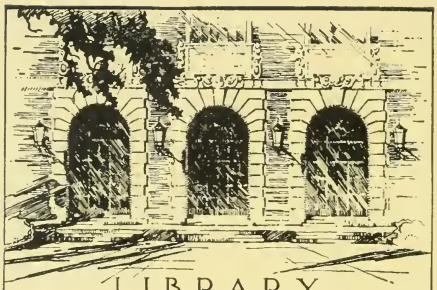

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WHITEFRIARS;

OR,

THE DAYS

OF

CHARLES THE SECOND.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

"As in a magic mirror, I will give you back the very hue and form of a departed age; the whims, the passions, the crimes, the virtues, the subtleties, the very personages." *Greybeard's Warning.*

VOL. III.

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CHARLES THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

A WARLIKE EXCURSION IN THE HIGHLANDS.

MERVYN commenced his march early on a very cloudy morning, which seemed to presage no lucky issue to his enterprise. He left Dumbarton, however, in safe hands, preferring to miss the services of some forty of his best men, to leaving his basis of operation, and, sole point of retreat, at the mercy of chance. His little army consisted of about two hundred men, of whom about half were regular soldiers, and the rest picked men of the Lowland militia. Very doubtful, however, of his reception, he determined to march by an unusual way and to cross the mountains at Tarbet by

a route, if route it could be called, known only to shepherds and deer-hunters, and deemed impassable. But relying on the statements which many of the latter class united in making, that it was quite possible in the summer-time to overcome the obstacles offered by nature unless aided by men, he resolved on one of the most extraordinary marches which had been made in those parts since the wildly chivalrous exploits of Montrose.

It was not without some emotions of awe and curiosity that Mervyn approached that lofty chain of dark hills which hid as it were a new world, where the opinions and manners of a barbarous departed age were still in full vigour. His guides were two old deer-hunters, familiar with every pass and defile, and as he was obliged to confide himself wholly to their bribed faith, it was not without much secret alarm that he found himself and his little army plunging deeper and deeper into those tremendous mountain solitudes. Valley after valley, narrow and deep, and hemmed in by dark hills of coarse heath, and crowned by bare pinnacles of rock; torrents rushing madly down those fathomless glens; rugged hills sloping down to the shining breasts of salty inland lakes; sweet glimpses of green and fertile lowlands reposing like nymphs in the arms of satyrs; endless successions of rank gorse, marsh, and hill upon hill of short strong grass, which seemed piled like stairs to heaven;—all past in grand panoramas before the young leader's awe-struck gaze. They encountered no living being but a few shepherds, who fled at their approach, numerous flocks of sheep, and herds of

deer. Mervyn, however, allowed his soldiers to touch nothing on the march but the provisions they had brought with them, except a few heads of deer which, as a wild game, he considered lawful spoil.

The eagle screaming in his rocky abysses, the roar of torrents, the strange lights gleaming and wandering among the mountains, now all a-glow with purple and crimson heather, then dark and dun as sorrow, filled the young soldier's mind with ideas of sublimity and grandeur, which seemed to satisfy a want in his poetical and somewhat dreamy nature. The excitement too of enterprise, and the consciousness of a proud responsibility, were gratifying to a mind without much actual experience, and full of the chivalric legends of Ariosto.

The first day's march was quite unmolested, and at night they bivouacked under a lovely autumn moon, on the summit of one of those vast green braes on which the Highland shepherd rears his chief wealth. Mervyn knew that the flying herdsmen would have spread the news of his march in a few hours, and he was anxious to allow as little time as possible to prepare resistance. His drums beat with the first peep of light, and towards noonday his little army came to the last ridge of those wild sierras which sweep downward to the glittering waters of Loch Fyne. On the opposite shores of the Loch, backed by another dark pile of mountains, the towers of Inverary arose in desolate grandeur.

Hitherto they had met with no opposition, in fact had seen scarcely a living being, and Mervyn began to fear

something ominous in this continued disappearance of the numerous clan inhabiting the regions he had now entered. But he had no resource but perseverance, and he continued his march around the rocky basin of the Loch, passing through defiles which, by their natural difficulties alone, might have effectually barred all entry to an invader. But these terrible passes were quite undefended, the cottages on their march deserted, and not a sign of habitation to be met with. As he approached Inverary, however, the range of black hills on his right sometimes poured fourth a sudden cloud of Highlanders, who seemed to watch their movements, but without any hostile demonstration of their own intentions.

Mervyn and his little army halted within a few miles of Inverary, in a position of great strength, for it was defended by a morass on one hand and a deep glen on the other, where he resolved to ascertain the real disposition of his opponents. Accordingly he sent out scouts, and one of his sergeants with a flag to Inverary, stating that he desired an interview with the Countess of Argyle, or any of her deputies, to announce his majesty's pleasure, which he had come to execute in that country.

This message produced an immediate effect; three Highland gentlemen, evidently men of superior rank, returned with the sergeant. One of these, a tall, stately man, attired in the clan-tartan, though of richer materials, and with a costly mantle of sables, fastened round his breast by silver wolf's paws, seemed to be the chief personage; and he informed Mervyn that the Lady

Argyle was in her castle of Inverary, and very much surprised to hear that the king had thought it necessary to have his pleasure announced in her country by a military force; that she desired only to know his majesty's pleasure to obey it, and therefore requested Captain Mervyn to come to Inverary and announce it to her personally, and that meanwhile she sent her dear cousins, Sir Duncan Campbell of Inverlochy, and Ronald of Tarbet, as hostages for his safe return.

Mervyn consented readily to this plan, which he thought would obviate many inconveniences, and, accompanied by the Highland gentleman in sables, rode to Inverary, over a wild waste of moor and hill. It was sunset when they entered the castle, and Mervyn found that his companion was a man of apparent consequence, from the homage which was paid him by all whom they met. He was besides a man of very agreeable and fluent conversation, and seemed well acquainted with the state of political events and persons.

They entered the castle by a hall of great extent, the walls of which were of blue granite, garnished with stags' heads, horns, and other sylvan trophies, arms of various ages and manufactures, shields, targets, pikes, claymores, steel-coats and helmets. Two vast fires of pine logs burned at either end, in cavernous chimneys, and three oaken tables, extending the whole length of the hall, seemed prepared for a banquet. This apartment was filled with a great variety of persons, some sitting in conversation, but the greater part standing to receive the guests. They were nearly all fine muscular-

looking men in the Highland garb, many of them of quality; but there was mingled with them a few persons whose coarse Lowland habits, long ascetic faces, and drawling tongues, announced them as covenanters.

It was with evident and very great astonishment that Mervyn recognised, in conversation with the countess, who sat at the upper end of the hall, in great state, surrounded by her ladies, the faces of several persons familiar to him in London. The principal of these was the Lord Howard, Monmouth's great friend and abettor in all his projects. There was one Rumsey, a creature of Shaftesbury's, a man of very blandishing manners, with a sly, foxy expression of countenance, likely to put a physiognomist on his guard. There was another, an old companion of Colonel Blood, and one of Cromwell's boldest lieutenants, who afterwards figured in the Rye House Conspiracy. It was Rumbold. He had a large burly head, and only one eye, the other being knocked out by a blow which disfigured the whole side of his face, and he was deeply pitted with the smallpox.

"You are welcome, sir, very welcome," said the countess, rising to receive her military guest. "Whatever your message be, the messenger is our guest, and as such deserves all honour."

"I thank you, madam," replied Mervyn, bowing deeply, and somewhat struck with the dark beauty of the lady's features, and with the melancholy tones of her voice. "But I am afraid my business here has little claim on your hospitality."

"Do not state it then till you have had some little

conversation with my Lord Howard, who is direct from the Duke of Monmouth," said the countess, hastily. "Meanwhile we pray you to partake of such poor refreshment as our wild country can afford, and rest awhile from—"

"No, madam, I must needs decline your courtesy," interrupted Mervyn. "I am here at the king's orders to arrest the Earl of Argyle, if he be in these parts, and will not taste the salt of any man, with such a purpose in my heart."

"Arrest Argyle in the midst of his clan!" echoed Mervyn's companion, with a grim laugh, which was repeated in a variety of tones by the brawny warriors around. "Prithee, sir, have you ten thousand men at your heels?"

"I have the king's authority, sir, backed with which I fear not to do my duty against any odds!" replied Mervyn, warmly.

"Well, Captain Mervyn, but first hear what we have to say," said Howard, taking his arm in a mysterious manner. "My lady countess will pardon us awhile." And he led the young leader apart, into a dark octagonal recess formed in a tower which overlooked the lake.

"Come, my dear Mervyn, let us drop this farce," he said, with a smile. "Here is the duke's letter—read it, and give us your opinion?"

As he spoke, he handed a letter to Mervyn, sealed with Monmouth's arms, and in his own handwriting. The duke began by assuring him that he perceived the

justice of all his reasoning on the expedition, and the total inadequacy of the forces at his command; and that so chimerical an idea as that of arresting Argyle in his own country had never occurred to him as a possibility; it was in fact with a very different intention that he had directed Mervyn to march:—this was no less than to join his troops, already well disposed that way, to the clansmen of Argyle, make a sudden descent on Glasgow, and proclaim the Covenant, and the redress of divers political grievances! The whole west of Scotland, he said, was ready to burst out in a flame of insurrection, which would soon spread to England, and Shaftesbury and other nobles of his powerful party had promised to take the seizure of Glasgow as a signal for a revolt in London. Thus the government would be distracted, and not know which way to turn, and meanwhile Monmouth would march against Glasgow with an army devoted to him, which on approaching should fraternise with the insurgents, and proclaim him general of the Scots and English armies for the redress of grievances. Dumbarton, according to the duke, was left in the hands of a partisan of the commonwealth, so that no resistance need be apprehended there. To concert this grand rebellion it seemed that Howard represented the duke; Rumsey, Shaftesbury and his party; and Rumbold, the desperate republicans of Cromwell's time, ready to dare and do any thing. Many clans in alliance with Argyle, and favourers of the Covenant, had promised their adherence, and on the whole it seemed indeed a plot of a most alarming and extensive nature. Vast re-

wards were promised to Mervyn for his adherence and services to the cause, and divers hints thrown out, that it was the last offer of an exalted destiny which fortune was likely to make him. On the other hand it was pretty plainly intimated that he had not much freedom of choice, as he and his troops were at the mercy of Argyle and his clan.

"Well, and what says the gallant Sidier Roy?" exclaimed Mervyn's Highland companion, impatiently stepping into the recess.

"He says that he is not a traitor, and that this is treason—black, unholy treason!" exclaimed Mervyn, tearing the letter into a thousand pieces.

"Are you mad?" said Howard, with extreme surprise. "Why, the duke told us you were all prepared to do as he pleased, and that you had been much injured by the court!"

"In all lawful matters, *I am* prepared," replied Mervyn, "but not to betray my king and country, and my own honour! I will not believe that the Duke of Monmouth ever wrote this letter, and I am willing to put what interpretation you please on your presence here, but I have a duty to perform here, and that only —I demand from you all, in the king's majesty's name, if he be refuged in these countries, the person of Archibald, Earl of Argyle, as a traitor and fugitive."

"He is here then," replied the Highlander, with a fierce smile, and striking his brawny chest. "I am Maccuilmore, chief of the Campbells, and now what have you to say to me?"

"I arrest you in King Charles's name," replied Mervyn, resolutely, "and I command you to surrender yourself."

"Look here," exclaimed the chieftain with a hoarse laugh, and throwing open the window, he drew a pistol from his girdle and fired it over the loch. In a moment the opposite hills seemed covered with Highlanders, who ran down to the shores of the lake, and seemed assembling in masses below. "Look here, Captain Mervyn!—a thousand Campbells are there, all men of bone and sinews, who will suffer themselves to be hacked to pieces to the last man ere any Saxon shall lead their chieftain hence by force."

"You muster a strong power, but I trust, not to resist the king's authority," replied Mervyn, gazing with an undismayed eye over the assembling host.

"The king is in the hands of arbitrary and popish counsellors," said Howard. "I marvel what great hopes you have in them, Master Mervyn, that you reject the only chance of grasping glory and fortune at once, which fate may ever put in your way?"

"What, Lord Howard, do you think that by any act of mine I will assist to place in power the butchers of Godfrey and Van Huysman?" said Mervyn, with strong emotion. "Besides, you are mistaken in all your calculations. The clans of the north detest you—England is unripe for a revolt—Dumbarton is safe in loyal hands—and if need be, I will hack myself a way out of these mountains, or you shall slay the officer and soldiers of your king!"

In vain did the other plenipotentiaries in this extraordinary conference crowd around him, and press him with a great variety of arguments and entreaties. All the loyal and honourable feelings of his heart revolted from the treachery contemplated, and it seemed as if the time prophesied by Van Huysman had arrived, when the salvation of the catholic church in England seemed to hang on his breath, for its total destruction was no doubt one of the objects of the fierce sectarians who called themselves covenanters and political reformers of the time. Threats were tried with an equal want of success, and but for Lady Argyle's interference, violence in the heat of passion might have been resorted to, for the wilder guests outside began to take a part in the controversy. Argyle even dropped obscure hints that Mervyn's soldiers would not remain faithful to him, and fearful thatsomething sinister was in agitation in his camp, he demanded to return thither. Howard and the chieftain both pressed him to take at least the night to consider their proposition, and fearful that they would not let him go at all, he tacitly agreed, and was at last allowed to depart.

On returning to his camp, and dismissing the hostages, he saw clearly enough that the soldiers expected some extraordinary revelation, and from the knowledge he had of their principles, he feared they had been tampered with to some purpose in his absence. But to put in execution the resolution which he had formed in his own mind, he affected a very cheerful air, directed the soldiers to light large fires, accepted with great affability

a present of provisions which arrived from Inverary, and in presence of the messengers made every preparation as if to spend the night on the ground which he occupied.

But such was far from being Mervyn's intention. Surrounded as he was by overwhelming numbers, and with a secret of such importance in his possession, he felt that the enemy could not intend to let him escape out of their clutches; at the same time he reflected on the chances that Dumbarton might be seized, and his retreat in that direction cut off.

The vital importance of an immediate resolution now struck him too strongly to allow of hesitation; for as night advanced all the hills and borders of the lake gleamed with fires, lit by the Highlanders in their bivouacs round the castle of their chief. He determined therefore on a measure which would have done credit to a general of the daring and rapid school of our own times. He suffered his soldiers to eat their supper and even make preparations for the night's bivouac; but suddenly the order was issued to march, and without allowing time for remonstrance or disobedience, the little army commenced its retreat, in all possible silence, and under the propitious shadow of a very dark night. Mervyn directed the fires to be heaped, and himself brought up the rear to prevent any straggling which might betray his intentions.

Calculating that the Highlanders, if they discovered his departure, would conclude he had taken the least difficult and dangerous way, he preferred returning by the

road he had come, over their wildest and most desolate mountains. His Highland guides had now, however, deserted him, and he was obliged to trust to his own recollections and the conjectures of his officers, in the depth of night, crossing a black and desolate range of fells and glens which offered no road, and scarcely a single point to which the memory could cling. Nevertheless it was with great delight that he took a farewell glance of the illuminated Loch and hills of Inverary, and plunged into the darkness of a deep valley skirted on both sides by lofty mountains.

Mervyn could not assure himself of success, however, until the morning broke on his fatigued and straggling little host, and no signs of pursuit appeared. Still he allowed them but a short rest before he was again *en route*, and tarrying neither for stragglers nor those that were worn out with fatigue, he arrived at length in safety at Tarbet.

Here bad news awaited him. Sergeant Hoskins, the man whom he had left in charge of Dumbarton, had sent a messenger to inform him that the covenanters were stirring in all parts, and that he hourly expected an attack, which, with his trifling numbers, would very likely prove successful.

Mervyn's men were too much exhausted to continue their march, however necessary their presence at Dumbarton, but ordering them to follow after a few hours rest, he set off on horseback, with only a single trooper, and reached his castle in safety. The news of his sudden and almost marvellous return, and, perhaps, tidings

from their friends in the mountains, seemed to strike panic into the turbulent population around ; all signs of resistance disappeared, and the murmurs of the rising tempest sunk into a dead calm.

Mervyn had now time to reflect on what he had done, and though he in no wise repented his conduct, he apprehended with justice that he had forfeited Monmouth's patronage, and in fact incurred his hatred and that of the powerful faction which backed him. But the consciousness that he had done his duty, and the chivalric renown which he had acquired by the brilliant manner in which he had done it, somewhat consoled him. Gratitude for the kindness which the duke had shown him, and a faint hope of again conciliating his favour, made him resolve to know no more than what was generally understood by his troopers and the public, and he wrote to the council a detail of his expedition, wherein he omitted all the extraordinary proposals made to him at Inverary.

He received in reply a cold official statement, that the council approved of all he had done, but that they had learned from certain information that the Earl of Argyle was still at the Hague, and had not left that city during the two years of his exile. The epistle concluded by stating that as his great services had rendered him peculiarly odious to the westland people, and as the country was so tranquilized as no longer to need them, he was to prepare for a successor, in the person of one Colonel Rumbold, and to take his departure for Edinburgh immediately on the arrival of that officer.

Mervyn felt that this was driving him into a corner, and in the first flush of anger he half resolved to report all he knew to the Yorkists in London, and keep his command in spite of the council of Edinburgh. But the imminent hazard of such a step, and the experience he had obtained of the unbounded injustice of both the factions, made him hesitate. Then although his soldiers both loved and reverenced him, they were not likely to back him in a quarrel against Monmouth and the principles which were still so dear to them; indeed Mervyn was aware that intrigues were at work among them which he had much difficulty in winking at. But his perplexities were now put to rest by an event which burst so suddenly on Scotland that it took all parties and factions by surprise. The king dismissed his popular administration, recalled Monmouth, appointed the Duke of York in his room, deprived him of all his offices and places, and ordered him to retire to Holland or France.

A new world now began in Scotland, for no sooner was the duke installed in Holyrood House, than he commenced a wide and sweeping purification, as his courtiers called it, in which the partisans of Monmouth were most cruelly oppressed and maltreated. Mervyn had soon reason to conclude that he was regarded in the light of one of these, for he received an abrupt command to resign his governorship to an old cavalier officer, who arrived for that purpose, and to present himself at Edinburgh, to give his royal highness an ac-

count of his late expedition into Argyleshire, which appeared to the council of a very suspicious nature and result.

Mervyn obeyed without remonstrance or hesitation; indeed it was not without a considerable degree of satisfaction that he laid down an office which entailed so much inglorious bloodshed and harassing warfare on its possessor, more especially as his conscience acquitted him of all unnecessary cruelty or tyranny in the exercise of his great and irresponsible power.

On reaching Edinburgh, Mervyn immediately announced his arrival to the council, and considerably to his surprise, he received orders to attend the Duke of York in his private apartments at Holyrood, and following the messenger, he found himself shortly in the presence of the royal viceroy himself.

The Duke of York, like most of the Stuart family, was a man of noble stature and commanding features, with a somewhat gloomy character of expression. He was sitting alone, in a narrow ill-furnished chamber, poring over a heap of papers which lay before him. Mervyn was startled at the suddenness of his introduction, and coloured deeply, but he was still more astonished at the graciousness of his reception; the duke extended his hand, and smiled affably as the young soldier bent down in some confusion to kiss it.

"Well, sir, you look well after your extraordinary campaign," said the duke. "Think not we have disgraced you. We reserve you for something better than

a scarecrow to keep a few rebellious peasants in awe. Besides, we are curious to hear the particulars of your Highland tour."

"It was entirely against mine own opinion and advice, please you, that I undertook it," said Mervyn, with some hesitation. "The particulars of my expedition I transmitted in a letter to the late council, a copy of which——"

"I have read *that*—it contains only half the truth, man," said the duke, hastily. "I am perfectly well acquainted with all that happened to you at Inverary, and the projected most dangerous rising which your heroic loyalty and chivalrous courage totally disconcerted. And let me add that I expected no less from a pupil of that revered and sainted martyr, blessed Father Van Huysman, whose soul God keep!"

"But by what means did your royal highness—"

"No matter, sir!—a man who has the inheritance of three kingdoms at stake on the intrigues of a bold and crafty faction, must keep his eyes open. But I recognise in you a champion of my cause, and that of heaven and our religion, so severely menaced by these ferocious sectaries. The tidings of this conspiracy drove his majesty to his late sudden measures; but it would have cost seas of blood to set matters to rights again had you acted in the smallest particular otherwise than you have done. I am obliged, however, at present to content myself with the banishment of this insolent bastard, who pretends to my crown. And mark you the depth of policy in these dangerous men!—they put you upon

this enterprise because they knew if you proved refractory, your evidence, on account of your strange connexion with the popish plot, would avail little with a factious jury. Do you think it was for any love of you? Read this paper!—it was found in Monmouth's state cabinet, abandoned in the hurry of flight."

Mervyn mechanically took the offered paper, and read, with amazement and indignation, a letter from Shaftesbury to Monmouth, in which the former refused to confirm Mervyn's appointment to Dumbarton Castle, and advised the duke to pretend that it was owing to the opposition of the Yorkists; so that the injustice done to him might plunge the young soldier, heart and soul, into *the* cause.

The Duke of York remarked with satisfaction the indignation visible in Mervyn's expressive features; but he gave the letter back with a silent bow.

"You see, then, what manner of backers these traitors are," he said, quietly. "But now you shall perceive the difference between constituted and usurped authority. His majesty will not permit any proceedings to be taken against these conspirators, as his son—or rather Lucy Waters's, for Heaven knows that is the safest side of his parentage—is so deeply concerned in it. But, in token of his admiration and appreciation of your conduct, he appoints you to the vacant captaincy of his gentlemen-at-arms, by which you will be very near his person; and this is but a step, Master Mervyn, on your way of fortune."

Mervyn was dazzled by this sudden lustre of his

lucky stars, and thanked the duke with an energy and eloquence which seemed to please him highly.

"We must have you in parliament too," he said, with a smile. "But, meanwhile, you will be highly useful to us near his majesty's person; for I think, Captain Mervyn—I think," he said, with much emphasis, "I may calculate on one true friend, who will not desert me in my troubles, when they come."

Mervyn raised the cross of his sword, and kissed it with significant fervour; and the interview shortly afterwards terminated in the highest mutual satisfaction.

CHAPTER II.

A COURTIER'S DEBUT.

A FEW weeks after the events above recorded, Mervyn arrived in London, and he found that the court had removed to Windsor, to celebrate Christmas in the usual pomp and state of the period. He resolved, however, on resting himself a day in the great city, as well as to recover from the physical fatigue of a journey in those days considered of immense extent, as to inquire into the changes and aspect of the political world. But with what different opinions and eyes did he now contemplate things, with the light of his enlarged experience of the world, and from the elevation of a brilliant position!

The nation was in a ferment, seething and boiling like a witch's caldron of many incompatible and direful ingredients; and as there was no state-chemist of

sufficient skillor power to fuse the discordant materials into a consistent mass, they threatened to burst in some terrible explosion. Republicans, monarchists of all shades and degrees, fanatic and republican conspiracies, a turbulent nobility, a wrathful but silent people, were the ingredients of the witch-broth. The wild fervour of religious opinion kindled by the Reformation, was at its last but fiercest effulgence, and philosophical observers beheld the extraordinary spectacle of a most profligate court ruling over a sternly religious people. All parties and factions in the state, to use a paradox which would sound absurd of any other age or people, were at the height of hope and desperation.

The moods and humours of the time could be discerned by an intelligent eye in the smallest scattered particulars, and Mervyn gathered more information, as he wandered through the streets, than many a dullard who was behind the scenes of the great drama itself. Pamphlets on the succession, on the principles of divine right, and polemical tracts, abounded on the booksellers' stalls; and happening to wander into a church, he perceived the immense decline of the Oatesian faction, for there was only a small congregation assembled to hear that great man hold forth in a vehement harangue against popery. In this grand assault on the Beast, as he called the catholic church, he spared no rank, and preserved no decency. The language of scripture and of the fish-market were used alternately; the pope, even the king and the court, he assailed with a frothy violence and invective which drew from his sympathizing

audience sighs and groans and tears. But Mervyn was unable to endure the agony of recollections which rushed upon him at the mere tones of that splay voice, and burning with indignation he left the profaned temple of the God of mercy and peace.

The sight of Oates, however, brought his reputed father to his recollection, which, with an indefinite idea of obtaining some information on his mysterious connexion with Lady Howard, made him resolve to visit Blood in his confinement of the King's Bench. He took a boat accordingly, crossed the river, and threading a series of rural lanes, arrived under the lofty walls of the prison, crowned with their glittering chevaux-de-frise.

Mervyn was admitted by a lugubrious-faced turnkey, whose paucity of words and stoicism of manner seemed acquired by a life-long practice in that dismal receptacle of fortune's wrecks. He looked with much surprise and suspicion at Mervyn when he inquired for Colonel Blood, but pointed laconically to a distant group of racket-players, whose uproarious clamour and huge cans betokened a company of hearty drinkers.

It was a bitterly cold day, and the snow lay in white and glistening masses on the gables and projecting roofs of the huge melancholy piles of building forming the prison. The King's Bench was governed at that time, when prison discipline was little understood, on the sole principle of keeping the prisoners secure, and every species of profligacy was allowed to the gain of the officers. Gambling and drinking seemed the chief amuse-

ments; a regular market was held of all sorts of commodities, at an exorbitant rate; brandy-shops, dice-rooms, and other places of infamous recreation abounded. Some, whose gambling propensities had brought them there, still indulged in the darling ruin, and staked even the rags on their backs. It was the very sink of that wild, profligate, and reckless age; beaux who had once glittered as the ornaments of courts, ruined merchants, spendthrift heirs, male and female gamesters, royalists and republicans, stripped equally bare in the up-and-down mutations of fortune, awaited there the great deliverer of all mankind—Death.

As he approached the racketers, the uproar among them seemed to increase. Suddenly arose one of the storms frequent in that fierce atmosphere of human passions, where, the restraints of decency being altogether thrown aside, the savage and brutal nature of man predominated. A crowd rushed around the racketers, and it seemed to Mervyn that two of them were having a furious quarrel. This soon changed into a fight, and when he arrived at the scene of action, he found that one had over-thrown his antagonist, and was struggling with him on the ground. The victor, however, soon completed his triumph, by dashing his enemy's head against the stones till he was senseless, and then rising, Mervyn recognised in his flushed and brutal features the very man he sought.

Instantly the inexplicable feeling of aversion which had sunk on him when he first beheld the redoubted colonel, came over him with renewed force, and he was

about to move off with the crowd which was carrying the wounded combatant to a neighbouring brandy-shop, when with an effort he forced himself to advance, exclaiming, "Well, Colonel Blood!"

On hearing the voice of Mervyn, that personage, who was now standing by himself wiping his streaming face, looked up, grew suddenly pale, and staggered back a few steps, with his eyes nearly starting from their sockets. But he recovered himself as suddenly, and extended his hand with a loud assurance, that he was as welcome as the flowers of May; then observing that there was blood upon his hand, he withdrew it hastily, and uttered something like an apology, which suddenly concluded with a burst of tears.

Tears from the eyes of Colonel Blood! Mervyn gazed as doubtfully as if he had seen water spout from a rock. His first reflection ascribed it to maudlin intemperance; and then his heart smote him with the suggestion that it might be the yearnings of affection. He stood hesitating and much embarrassed, but the colonel hastily choked his emotion.

"This is kind of you, lad, kind of you—when all have deserted me but poor Tom—poor Tom Hunt—and he is in Newgate now," he exclaimed. "You see I have been having a bit of a breeze—I mean, with that cursed rogue, Heron; he thinks, forsooth, to unthrone me, to be cock o' th' alley—as if Colonel Blood, be he where he may—ay, even in a dungeon!—will be any thing but king of the country. I am glad to see you, boy—glad to see you—looking so well too—so like—so like a noble-

man!—How black your hair is turned! Well, well, come this way; I'll treat you—I am not quite a beggar yet."

And he produced a small coin, and then burst into a bitter laugh, and chucked it scornfully away among a crowd of ragged boys.

Mervyn was affected by these visible signs of an anguished spirit, and his consciousness of what the proud though criminal heart of the man must feel under its load of shame and sorrow. He put on a cheerful aspect, however, and invited him to take a bottle of wine in one of the drink-shops at hand.

"No, no—no thin potations for me, no wine!" replied Blood, with the same hollow laugh. "Brandy for me, brandy for me!—Nothing like brandy for drowning care! Come along, boy. I'll show you where they keep right Nantzic."

He then led the way to a tap-house, the goodness of whose liquors seemed vouched by the roaring merriment going on within. They entered this haunt of Bacchus, and as well as Mervyn could see for smoke and confusion, found themselves in a dirty tap-room, filled with a drinking, gambling, and fighting mob.

"I always encourage the poor devils here—I knew them when, like myself, they saw better times," said Blood in a hoarse whisper. "You may remember Bradley, that kept the 'Heaven' in Whitefriars, that night we supped with King Charles and Nell Gwyn. There he is—Ah, you hardly know him again—he has drunk himself into an idiot."

Mervyn did indeed perceive a shrunk, starved-looking figure, seated with his legs slinging loose on a barrel, draining a leaden pot, and suffering a part of the liquor to run from his hanging jaws. His wife, still more sluttish than in the olden time, squalid and half-clad, ran about, serving the guests; and from her they obtained permission to ensconce themselves behind some barrels, which served as a kind of bar, and where they could discourse out of observation.

"Good, good! how it warms the heart," said Blood, swallowing nearly half a pint of brandy at a toss. "Brandy is the only friend that, after ruining a man, is still willing to comfort his misery. Wine, jolly wine and beauty, made you an orphan, Mervyn—I mean of all but your affectionate father.—But, by the by, I hear you deny the relationship. I am not your father, am I not? Well, well, if I gave you not life I preserved it, and that is always something in the balance."

"But how did you preserve my life, colonel?" said Mervyn, with affected carelessness.

"But how?" repeated Blood, gloomily. "No matter, it is so—but how is a secret which I must take with me to the grave. Well, boy, I heard of you in the wars—you have behaved yourself like a gentleman, and I do think that they above," he added, with singular solemnity of tone, "are keeping you for some marvellous purpose. If I would consent to your death now, I might be free this instant—might quit this dungeon, where I am otherwise chained for life. But I will

not, I will not—they shall not harm one hair of your head."

"Nay, nay, I know I am not worth ten thousand pounds in your sight," said Mervyn, with an incredulous smile.

"Yes, Mervyn, ten thousand pounds are offered for your destruction!" reiterated the colonel with great energy.

"I should like to know to whom it can be worth so much," replied Mervyn, laughing. "It would almost bribe me to suicide."

"Suicide!" repeated Blood, with a dark and melancholy look at the noble and singularly handsome face of the young man. "Well, well, no matter—but as I said before, how very black your hair has grown! It was as white as flax in your childhood. Oh, Mervyn, what I might have been had I devoted half so much energy, skill, and courage in good as I have in evil! Well, I have wronged you—but for all that they shall not tempt me to your hurt—no, not with the mines of Potosi!"

"Meanwhile if any thing less than a mine will be of service to you, and as it seems our relationship authorizes me, here is my purse," said Mervyn, touched with a certain impress of truth in the man's vehemence.

Blood looked at the purse with a visible inward struggle, then swallowing another huge gulp of brandy, he clutched it eagerly.

"I shall pay thee some day, lad," he muttered. "The time will come—a man cannot last always, and look

how I am shrunk!" And he bared his arm to show how distinctly the muscles were visible. "When it comes to *that*, Mervyn, I'll clear matters up for you in style. Besides, these are stirring times—the court can not do without me. I shall have the king's bail some day, or I will give them leg-bail."

And he again nearly choked himself with a profuse draught of the strong liquor. He then inquired what had brought Mervyn to London, and seemed much struck with the account he gave. But on Mervyn mentioning the king, Blood launched into a vehement invective against him, upbraiding him with ingratitude, in leaving such an old and faithful servant as himself to perish in a prison for a paltry ten thousand pounds!

The transitions of the colonel's mood from dejection to fury were strange and violent; and as he continued to swallow glass after glass of brandy, his Irish temperament passed from extreme despondency to the wildest hopes. He spoke of the favour he still was in at court, of how the king needed him, if he could but get out of these accursed walls.

"They watch me well, for the marshal is held in a heavy bond," he said; "but still I am certain, quite certain, that with a little assistance I could escape. Remember how I saved you from devil Oates, and don't be ungrateful. You will not leave your father to rot in a prison, boy! Do but lend me your dagger, bring me in a crow-bar, and have a horse waiting under the little tower that butts on St. George's fields; and if I do not get out!—the wall

there is old and decayed, and I am certain I could swing myself to the top if there was some one to throw me a rope over."

"You are mad, Master Colonel, to think I will take any share in such a matter," replied Mervyn, on the spur of the moment.

"You won't, ha!—then you are a villain and a coward!" yelled the ruffian, who was now much excited with drink and rage.

"It is well you shield yourself under the name of father!" said Mervyn, calmly.

"Well, well, lad, but to leave an old pall in distress," muttered Blood, somewhat less vehemently. "But, at least lend me your dagger, and I promise you I will work myself out a way with it."

"To murder some inoffensive jailer? No, by Heaven!" exclaimed Mervyn, warding off the hand with which Blood strove to clutch the hilt of his weapon.

This refusal, obstinately reiterated, set fire to the colonel's irritated feelings, and he swore fearfully at the young man, calling him villain and coward, to desert his comrade in such extremity. He railed on so bitterly that at last the persons present began to meddle; and, overcome with disgust, Mervyn rose to depart.

"You are better, Colonel Blood," he said, "you are better here among your fellows, where, plot and murder as you will, you can do no harm. Farewell!—here is the reckoning, hostess."

And he threw the only coin he had reserved on the

table, and bowing ironically to Blood, left him speechless with rage. But he had not gone many yards ere the colonel despatched a pewter tankard at his head, which, though it missed its aim, was sent with such goodwill, that it was bent flat against the wall.

CHAPTER III.

A ROYAL CHRISTMAS IN THE OLDEN TIMES.

MERVYN arrived at Windsor on Christmas-eve, and found the picturesque village in a state of great bustle and preparation for the ensuing festival. The Duke of York had given him a letter to Pepys, the secretary of the Admiralty, who was with the court; and by him he was immediately presented to the king. Charles received him very graciously, though he seemed almost to have forgotten his person, and assured him that he was entirely satisfied with his brother's choice of a captain to his guard. His majesty then turned to resume a conversation in which he was engaged with his chief page, Chiffinch, and a gentleman, who, Pepys told our hero afterwards, was John Dryden, the poet. They were planning a masque, with which the king intended to amuse the queen and her ladies on the following day.

Pepys took considerable trouble in installing the young courtier into his new office, and instructing him in its duties, and under his auspices Mervyn entered on all his rights and privileges. He held a review of his glittering band, which principally consisted of ancient battered cavaliers, and established himself in his allotted apartments. He gave a handsome supper to celebrate his inauguration, at which Mr. Pepys presided, and where they all got drunk, and toasted the Duke of York on their knees. And thus passed his first night at court.

Pepys came early the next day, as well to rouse Mervyn betimes, as to see how his magnificent dress, as captain of the gentlemen-at-arms, became the stalwart figure of the young soldier. He was delighted with it, and Mervyn himself was not at all displeased with the splendid figure he cut in the mirror, with his velvets and gold embroidery, especially as he reflected that in all probability Mistress Sydney would be present at the festival. But then it occurred to him, with a somewhat chilling effect, that the daughter of Sydney would look with contempt on a gilded slave of the court, as he must now appear to her. But then again Pepys assured him that he looked like a costly enamel which he possessed of Francis I., in his young days, when he was reputed the handsomest man of his time. Finally, he commenced his duties by taking up his station in St. George's Hall, where the great banquet was to be held, lining the upper end with his gentlemen, while the yeomen took charge of the staircase and entrances.

The preparations were in the usual gorgeous style of

a royal Christmas of the time. The vast hall was hung with silver damask, except where it was adorned with glories of the painter's art, and hung round with graceful arches and festoons of holly and red berries. In the centre of the ceiling was an oval painting, representing Charles II., in the habit of the Garter, with his three kingdoms allegorized around him; and from that hung a vast bush of misletoe, in form of a bower, upheld by flying Cupids. There were three tables, extending nearly the length of the hall, spread with crimson velvet and gold plate. Two thrones were prepared at a raised dais for the king and queen, covered with rich canopies of cloth of gold. Enormous fires of cedar-wood burned on the marble hearths, and diffused a rich perfume in the air, and crowds of attendants, in all the gorgeous glitter of their several costumes, threw a splendid confusion into the scene.

Some time elapsed ere the pompous bursts of music, and the appearance of the chamberlain with his marshals at the door, announced the approach of the merry monarch and his court. Mervyn gazed with strained eyes towards the grand entrance, and at first he could discern only a mass of rich colours, glitter, and waving plumes. But at last objects grew more distinct, and he perceived that the queen led the procession, leaning on the arm of the Duke of Ormonde, and that the king followed with a lady, to whom he was talking with great vivacity and interest. But words can do but faint justice to Mervyn's sensations when he re-

cognised in the young and supremely-lovely woman, whose brilliant eye seemed lit up with coquetry and vivacity—Aurora Sydney herself!

She was changed, but on every point advantageously; the young bud had blossomed into a peerless flower. But there was something more than mere loveliness in her countenance; there was an expression of mingled intellect and feeling, an electric flash in her eye, a brilliancy and sweetness in her smile, which denoted a mind and heart, in which lofty and romantic sentiment blended with all womanly softness and tenderness.

Our young hero gazed as if he were enchanted, and turned into a statue of admiration. As yet, however, she had not apparently observed the presence of her former *protégé*, probably not dreaming to find him in such a place and presence.

The banquet was served, the court seated, and amidst soft strains of music the festival proceeded. Mervyn had now an opportunity of studying in detail that galaxy of celebrated and profligate wits and beauties, whose decaying splendours still shed a false glare on the sunset of Charles's long reign. But he was absorbed in the beauty of Mistress Sydney, and vainly as he attempted to avert his eyes lest his prolonged gaze should attract observation, still they returned, with increased and devouring eagerness, to feast upon the loveliness of her form and features. But a bitter feeling of jealousy mingled, though unconsciously to himself, with this passionate revery of dawning love.

He saw that the king paid her great and marked attention, that he continually gazed and smiled at her, and that with the sparkling coquetry natural in one so young and beautiful, she seemed to delight in his witty gallantries, and repaid him with a vivacity and continued play of imaginative eloquence, which seemed to make the very air around her glitter.

The queen seemed almost as well pleased as her royal husband with this display, for though she was too much accustomed to his infidelities to notice any new instance of them, she was pleased to observe the manifest vexation of Castlemaine, the haughty frowns of Portsmouth, and the undisguised sadness of merry Mrs. Gwyn, and to know that they were caused by one whose goodness of heart and pride of honour were not to be tempted by all the monarchs of Europe sighing at her feet.

Mervyn, however, had no such comfortable persuasion, and though ignorant of what caused the restless aching in his heart, he stood behind the steps of the throne, in an agony of mingled jealousy and anger.

Many of the ladies of that voluptuous court had noticed the fine person of the new guardsman, but Mistress Sydney was too much absorbed in her amusements to do so. She was in the full career of wit and enjoyment when happening to turn her smiling eyes from the passionate gaze of the king, she suddenly perceived the young captain, leaning with an air of desperate indifference on his massive sword. Instantly the smile died away on her lips, the colour faded from her cheeks, and

she looked at him as if she had seen a spectre. On his part, Mervyn flushed a deep crimson, and in affected indifference played with the tassels of his cloak. After a moment, Mistress Sydney turned and made some observation to one of her neighbours, at which Mr. Pepys, who was sitting in the next place, reached over and replied with great eagerness, as if glad to show his information; and thenceforth it seemed as if Mistress Sydney took no further notice of the captain of the gentlemen at arms.

The banquet passed off in great splendour and hilarity, enlivened by the most glittering and unscrupulous wit, and on its removal the dessert appeared, but in a novel fashion. The hall of St. George suddenly darkened to a voluptuous twilight, and amidst strains of soft Italian music, entered a group of slenderly dressed dancers, attired as attendants on Pomona and Flora, and carrying baskets of fruits and flowers, in the most magnificent profusion. As soon as these nymphs had deposited their luxurious burdens, and danced a very intricate ballet, a group of satyrs rushed in and carried them off in their brawny arms, to the infinite delight of the court. The full blaze of light was then restored, and shone upon a scene of festal magnificence rarely equalled even in that gorgeous hall. Thousands of lamps shed their effulgence on the scene, and revealed an immense mass of objects descending the grand staircase, to some strange and roaring music of drums, fifes, and cymbals.

The foremost of these were three figures fantastically

dressed, one in clay-coloured robes, another in sea-green, a third in sky-blue—representatives of Earth, Ocean, and Air. These elements knelt at the king's feet, and in a pompous flow of verse, implored his majesty's indulgence to a poor Christmas pageant. Permission being graciously accorded, there entered a tall old man in white garments, with long frosty hair. This was Winter, who recited some verses in praise of himself, his sports, and fireside revelries. After him, with a renewed flourish of drums and trumpets, entered in motley pageantry, the Abbot of Misrule and all his attendants. A parti-coloured fool for a clerk, and a crowd of fanciful beings, such as fairies, satyrs, men with asses' heads, hobby-horses, and all the wild paraphernalia of ancient Christmas pastimes, rushed tumultuously in. To avoid giving offence to the queen, the abbot was garbed more like an eastern sultan than a western monk, but he wore a mitre. After him came a figure with icicles on his beard, very old, but hale and hearty in the visage, crowned with holly, and bearing a rich silver brazier, which glowed under a dish of plums burning in purple and blue flames.

Immediately after this personification of Christmas came an exhibition which excited full as much awe as admiration. It was a chariot of beautifully-carved mother of pearl, lined with blue velvet, and drawn by a tame lion in harness, whose fierce energies seemed controlled by a little postilion of a Cupid, almost in a state of nudity, with silvery swan's wings on his little shoulders. This Cupid carried a diadem richly wrought with

the words, "Love's Queen," sparkling in diamonds round the hoop. The procession, led by the Abbot of Misrule, approached steadily, the ladies cowering down as the lion passed, though the poor beast seemed perfectly quiet. Even Charles exclaimed in an under tone, "Sbodikins, Master John, will you warrant your lion?" to which the dignified bard replied with a neatly turned verse, showing how love is sovereign of all things, and rules the fiercest creatures as easily as the mildest.

Then began a sweet choir of Italian voices, singing in voluptuous harmony a song in praise of love and his delights.

Master Dryden then came forward, and in a very grand and majestic strain informed his majesty that the realm of love lacked a queen, and in the presence of so many most beautiful ladies must continue a republic, unless he would of his good grace appoint a wearer of the crown.

"If Love be a divinity he must needs know who is the worthiest, and on her let him bestow his crown," replied Charles, with a smile.

"But Love is blind, my liege! what say you, Dan Cupid?" replied the poet, and thereupon the little god began singing a madrigal in reply, in a voice of delicious sweetness, for he was in truth a famous musical dwarf belonging to the court:

LOVE'S MADRIGAL.

Heart, mine heart! why love we still
So vainly, yet for ever?—

The sunless rose dies, lost to light,
  But hopeless love—Ah ! never :
Still in despite of scorn unkind,
As flames curl higher 'gainst the wind,
Love still loves on—for Love is blind.

Heart, mine heart ! though deep, our pain
  We will not change for pleasure;
Thy frown, dear Maid, is dearer far
  Than others' smiles to treasure !
Why yearns the sunflower, still resigned,
After the sun it ne'er shall find,
But that she loves—and Love is blind !

Heart, mine heart ! I would we were
  The poorest thing that tends her,
Perchance some unregarded smile
  Would pay for all love lends her ;—
Alas ! to die had not repined,
So she the cypress wreath had twined,
For death is dread—but Love is blind.

"Well, then, Love, lend me heart, and I will lend you eyes," said Charles, gaily, and taking the crown he set it on the fair brow of blushing Mistress Sydney. The courtiers smiled, but a keen pang shot through Mervyn's heart. Charles meantime exclaimed "*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*" and pointed sternly to the motto over his throne, with a glance which spread universal gravity.

The Abbot of Misrule then invited the new queen to enter the chariot, and the king himself handed her in, assuring her she had nothing to fear, and patting the lion on his mane to re-assure her. The whole court

stood up to see the spectacle, and never did Mistress Sydney look more beautiful than now, when, blushing and smiling with mingled triumph and shame, the king led her down the hall. They had not gone far, however, in a parade round the tables, when a troop of beautiful children, dressed to represent fairies, tripped in, and danced airily round the triumph. But suddenly a hideous roar was heard, and there appeared a dragon with fiery purple scales and broad wings, flaming eyes, and vomiting fire from his huge jaws, a representative of the dragon of old romance.

The fairies took to flight, and the dragon approached the car of the Queen of Love, who looked considerably alarmed and doubtful as to the intentions of this new monster. But as it approached, the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard, and a mounted knight clad in resplendent armour, lance in hand, rode up the hall. This cavalier by his various ensigns represented the renowned St. George; his horse's hoofs were gilded, and covered with something soft, to hinder them from hurting the marble floor. Two splendid pages in cloth of gold attended at his bridle.

This valorous knight, as if to rescue the Queen of Love, rode full tilt at the dragon, and the dragon at the knight, so that they had just formed, with great artifice, the antagonistic group on the collar of the Garter, when, either startled by the blaze of torches thrown forward, or the cries of the combatants, the lion uttered a roar which soon showed the admiring spectators the difference between imitation and reality. A universal panic was

the consequence, especially as the animal grew furious, shook off his little rider, and made desperate efforts to break his thongs, roaring and churning his teeth. Mistress Sydney shrieked, and Charles and his courtiers looked pale with horror at each other, and the lion, either frightened or exasperated with the noise, suddenly made a tremendous dart forward, by which he broke his harness, and laid his head couching down as if preparing to spring on the chariot. At this moment a strong arm tore the lady from her dangerous pre-eminence, and a broad breast offered itself between her and her terrible antagonist. It was Mervyn! he rushed headlong over the table, snatched the spear from the nerveless arm of St. George, and stood brandishing and quivering it in the air, awaiting the spring of the couchant beast. But to the surprise and delight of all, the animal cowered down with a groaning yawn, probably taking the spear for a whip, with which he was no doubt well-acquainted. The keeper now rushed in, secured the lion, and at Charles's command removed it instantly. Meanwhile some ladies had raised the youthful Queen of Love, who had fallen insensible, and were engaged in administering restoratives. The king and Mervyn aided in this, and she soon revived, to pour forth a flood of thanks, seconded by the sweetest blush and the most eloquent tears, frankly acknowledging that she owed her life to the valour of her deliverer, and that she could never repay him.

Charles's satisfaction was equally great, and he showed it in his usual rash and hasty manner. "Come, St. George!" he exclaimed, snatching that unvalorous pa-

geant's sword, "I have found a knight worthier to wear true steel than thou!—down on your knees, Mervyn, and rise up one of our best and bravest companions in arms!"

Mervyn hesitated, but Mr. Pepys drew him eagerly forward, and in a dream of youthful vanity and triumph he knelt.

"And bear ye all witness," said Charles, raising the sword, "we give you our royal word that this is no carpet knight we are making; he won us Bothwell by his valour, and saved the country from a bloody outbreak by his prudence. Arise, Sir Mervyn—Sir Mervyn what? or Sir what Mervyn?" he added, after a moment's pause.

The dream was over! Mervyn coloured deeply, and was silent during a brief but dreadful moment. The name of Blood alone occurred to him—that name, the synonym of daring crime—and the tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

"Have you not two names then?" said Charles, amidst a general and irrepressible titter. "Well, no matter, it was your mother's improvidence; many a man hath no better claim to the noblest than his mother's assurance. But methought you had the honour to call Colonel Blood your ancestor?"

"He calls himself so, sire!—but I had rather be the first of my name than wear one so steeped in infamy!" replied Mervyn, resolutely.

"Right!—he is in the shade," said Charles, letting his sword sink gradually. "Well, I cannot dub a

knight who hath not two names for the heralds' books. Cannot you claim even a Fitz ?—Why, by St. George, your face puts one in for you ; you are as like the luckless brood of the Aumerles as ever was their most legitimate heir."

Mervyn started ; again that name, which seemed to meet him everywhere by some fatality, crossing his path at such a moment !—he almost felt called upon to assume it.

"And he hath already their second title for a christian name; there's something in it, sire !" said Pepys.

"Well, sir, Fitz-Aumerle shall it be ?" said the king, again raising his sword.

"No, sire, I will wear no man's honours but my own ; and, until I discover what my real parentage may be, I will have none !" said Mervyn, in a tone of deep but resolved feeling.

"Discover his parentage !" repeated Charles, with a derisive laugh, and tossing the sword back to St. George. "Well, if men will stand in their own light let them not complain of want of sun ! Sir, when you have found these enchanted waters in the Valley of Oblivion, I suppose we shall know how to reward you better."

Mervyn arose, and, bowing deeply, returned like one in a stupified revery to his former position as guardsman, his ears ringing with strange sounds, and his sight dim and confused. There he stood—publicly proclaimed a bastard, with a thousand sneering eyes upon him—so at least he thought.

His first clear perception after this miserable scene was seeing the king partake of the Christmas revel, by tasting the flaming snap-dragon. The guests thronged round this new point of attraction, and Charles set the example by snatching a burning plum from the furnace. The plums were soon gone, amid screams and laughter, and Christmas tried to run away with the furnace, but he was met by the Abbot, who threw a powder into it, which burst into a display of extraordinary coloured lights, and filled the hall with musky smoke. When this cleared up the whole pageantry had vanished, and when the revellers had partaken of the dessert, the tables were cleared for the royal ball.

Throughout the remainder of the feast, Mervyn was as one thunderstruck, and gazed like a figure carved in stone on the spectacle. The revels concluded with a dance under the misletoe, Charles setting an example which was eagerly followed, by kissing his partner, Aurora Sydney, under its licensing boughs. Then there was a general scramble for kisses, which concluded the feast, for the queen put an end to a somewhat rude scene by retiring, and the ladies of course followed. The meeting broke up as if by enchantment, the splendour dispersed and vanished like a glorious sunset into night, and Mervyn retired to his lonely chamber, in a state of mind almost impossible to analyze, so strangely mingled were love, jealousy, rage, and bitter scorn of himself and all mankind.

CHAPTER IV.

A KING'S WOOING.

THE queen returned on the following day to London, and as her retinue of course accompanied her, Mervyn was relieved from the immediate pangs of jealousy, which the king's attentions to the beautiful daughter of Sydney inflicted on him. Stag-hunts and other revelries followed, and nearly a month elapsed before Charles thought proper to return to his capital.

Mervyn meanwhile obviously grew in the royal favour, and when they returned to Whitehall, a wondrous change seemed to have come over his fortunes; great and small united in heaping civilities on him; the oldest courtiers predicted his rise; suitors implored his interest in their petitions; in short it was palpable even to his own modesty that he was growing a great man.

On arriving at Whitehall, the king went as usual to

pay a visit to the queen at Somerset House, but to Mervyn's jaundiced eye it seemed as if his only purpose was to see Aurora, her majesty's favourite attendant. He spent some bitter hours musing over this probability, and it was with very great and almost evident reluctance that he obeyed a summons by Chiffinch to attend the king on his return.

It was night, and Charles was in his bedroom alone, sitting over a bright sea-coal fire, on which, with his own royal hands, he had been mulling some sack. Two little silver tankards and some candied sops were beside him, and a glittering mass of jewels lay scattered about, just as he had thrown them off. The usual attendants of the chamber had all retired, and Charles motioned Chiffinch to disappear, which he immediately did, leaving the king and his gentleman alone.

"Come, boy, draw a stool, and help me to discuss this sack—Falstaff never brewed better," said Charles, pouring the tankards full.

"I drink then to your majesty's good agreement with your new parliament," said Mervyn, forcing a smile, and raising his goblet.

"Drink me not such ill-luck, I charge thee, for I shall never agree with them but when I am signing my abdication," replied Charles, hastily. "It is a death-struggle now between us—either they to Tower Hill, or I to Whitehall window. We are all conspirators, I and my people, and it remains to be seen which hath the better head for plots. It will come to the sword soon, Mervyn!—meanwhile, mark you the insolence of

this factious Colonel Sydney, and what he hath dared to do?"

"What hath he done, my liege?" said Mervyn, very eagerly.

"He hath sent in his daughter's resignation since the affair at Windsor, and will not allow her to come to court again under any pretext!"

Mervyn felt a rush of delight which he with difficulty kept concealed, but he said nothing.

"And just when I had all but won her to some little return of my passion," continued Charles—"when she lacked only a fair pretext and a chosen moment to yield! What think you, Mervyn?—did she not seem to eye me favourably? and what woman is insensible to the allurements of power and rank?"

"Your majesty's experience qualifies you to be a better judge than I can pretend to be," replied Mervyn.

"Doubtless, doubtless;—and now to the point on which I summoned you," said Charles, with a smile. "The conclusion to which I have now arrived, is to make my passion known to its fair object; and as you have a good pretext to go to Sydney's house to inquire after her health, I intend you to be my ambassador. Do me this matchless service, and matchlessly shall it be rewarded. I authorize you to propose any conditions, and as her father will to-morrow attend the great meeting of the malecontent members, you will have abundant time on your hands."

"And what conditions, sire?" said Mervyn, with a heavy pulsation of the heart.

"Her father a peerage—herself the duchy of Richmond, which I meant for Nell's son once," said the king. "In fact I will make her my queen if old Kate dies a natural death—but no poisonings, mind! Think you not this is an offer to tempt an angel, let alone a proud woman of Eve's flesh and blood?"

"Most gorgeous and kinglike! But Colonel Sydney would rather die than accept such glittering dishonour."

"Let him die then! Why, man, you croak like a ghost from a hollow tree; what ails you?"

"Drinking your majesty's health in too many bumpers last night," said Mervyn, with some degree of hesitation.

"Take a hair of the dog that bit you," replied Charles, replenishing the tankards. "I hope you are not such a fool as to let any milkish considerations stand in your way to honour and power. Why, boy, you know not what I may do for you yet. Mayhap I shall tire of this new toy as soon as of any other, and then you may come in for a good thing. What say you, Mervyn?—I have made dukes of men that had not half your leg—if Castlemaine had not been a proud ass, he might have stood Duke of Cleveland in his lady duchess's patent. And now it reminds me, as the old Sydney is so virtuous, he will need appearances to be kept up, and if you have a pretty jingling title, and the fat crown-lands which Richmond's death made us a present of the other day—would you find it impossible to do as many a better man hath done, and own your heir for your son?"

"My liege, I am the first of my family, and I intend

to be the last," said Mervyn, flushing darkly at this proposition, decently veiled at it was.

"Here, then, is a glittering preface to your discourse," continued Charles, unnoticing this in his own absorption, and taking a little key from his bosom, he opened a golden casket before him, and showed a magnificent set of diamonds sparkling on a crimsom velvet bed. "These will incline her to listen to your tale, and since the days of the serpent of Eden, no woman could shut her ears to the temptations of power and grandeur. Well, will you be my ambassador?"

"I will!" replied Mervyn, desperately. "But I beseech your majesty not to lay the ill-success of my embassy to my fault, if it succeed not—nor the merit to my good if it succeed."

"As you will—but I have private reasons to conclude that you will not fail," replied Charles, with a somewhat suspicious gaze at the young man. "Bring me the news on the instant, but rest assured that your own fortunes are involved in the event of to-morrow."

And rising, he dismissed the young courtier, in a mood which may be readily imagined.

CHAPTER V.

MONMOUTH, SYDNEY, AND RUSSELL.

THE next morning beheld Mervyn on horseback, wending his way towards Sydney's residence in the village of *St. Giles*—at that time one of the most pleasant and fashionable suburbs of the metropolis. Chiffinch greeted him at his toilet with a message from the king, exhorting him to use no delay, and with the casket of jewels, which in his hurry he had left behind. But those fatal words, "I have private reasons to conclude that you will not fail," rang in his ear all night, and deprived him of rest. He now took it for granted that there was some tacit understanding between the king and Mistress Sydney, and it was almost with the mere desperate hope of knowing the worst that he set out on his expedition.

Sydney's house was a very handsome villa, in the old

English style. It was bosomed in a large pleasure-ground profusely wooded, and adorned in the Italian style with statues and fountains, all old and moss-grown. There was an air of substance and accustomed dignity about the very waving of the massive oaks which lined the avenue to the house. A colony of rooks had taken up their immemorial abode in the loftiest branches, and cawed about the house with an air of security and vested right. The mansion was originally built in a fine old style, between the Elizabethan and the later Norman, when strength ceased to be the great desideratum of the architect; but it had received touches and additions from various ages and styles, as it past through the hands of possessors of more or less taste, and now presented a curious rambling mass of architecture which, incongruous as it was, had on the whole an imposing effect. The garden in front of the house was in the true old English style, narrow, tortuous, fantastic, the shrubs cut into peacocks, dragons, and wasps, the walks trim and precise, and profusely decorated with flowers.

Before, however, our hero had an opportunity of ascertaining all this, he had to summon courage to ring the porter's bell at a massive wicket; and he had reined his horse there several minutes before he dared finally resolve on that decisive measure. The sound of the bell almost startled him when at last he did the deed, and when the porter opened the gate and inquired his business, he could scarcely reply steadily, so strong was the emotion he felt. He asked for Colonel Sydney, whom of all men in the world he least wished to see.

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The porter answered that the colonel was out; but in reply to Mervyn's inquiry for Mistress Sydney, he desired him to proceed up the avenue to the mansion.

As he approached it two tall greyhounds came bounding out, and leaping about him; at the same time a lackey, in the simple gray livery of the Sydneys, made his appearance, and civilly inquired his business, on learning which he said that Mistress Sydney was at home, but that she had visiters with her. Mervyn desired to be announced merely as a gentleman from the palace.

The domestic led the way into an apartment evidently used as a library and study; it was large and handsome, wellhung with books, the windows overlooking Bloomsbury fields and the adjacent garden. There was a glorious blazing sea-coal fire, in which, like all true Englishmen, Sydney delighted, and near that cheerful centre of a winter apartment sat the fair mistress of the mansion and her two guests. Aurora was looking more than usually serious, and in fact somewhat embarrassed, for she was playing, seemingly unconsciously, with one of her long ringlets, while the other reposed in its white and perfect beauty on the rich folds of her black velvet dress. A lace veil which she was embroidering lay beside her on a little work-table, and a pet flower of great beauty bloomed in a fine porcelain pot close at hand. There was a superb Italian virginals, elaborately carved in the finest ebony, open at a little distance.

One of the visiters, and one only, was a stranger to Mervyn. He was a tall well-built man, with a flowing dark periwig, and a countenance somewhat large fea-

tured, grave and even melancholy, but with a character of stedfast and sober resolution, a perfect trustworthiness, in which the merest stranger might have confided, a gravity of eye and demeanour which announced a man not destined indeed to dazzle like a comet, by strange and erratic brilliancy, but to shine for ever, one of the great unalterable stars on which the pilots of English liberty fix their gaze in the wildest storms and the deadliest calms. The other visiter Mervyn recognised, with a start of very unpleasant surprise, as no less a personage than the Duke of Monmouth, whom he imagined to be almost in concealment at the Hague.

"A gentleman from the palace!" exclaimed Aurora, rising with some precipitation as the lackey uttered his announcement. "Ah! is it possible, Captain Mervyn!" she added, with a deep and vivid blush. "Oh, my Lord Russell, I was just telling you my adventure with the lion, and here is the preux chevalier who saved my life at the hazard of his own. Captain Mervyn, my lord duke!"

"Captain Mervyn and I are old acquaintances, madam," replied Monmouth, with his gay characteristic ease. "We were both at Bothwell Briggs, but he was the first man of us all that crossed. I am glad to see you, sir, though the times are altered with us both."

And he extended his hand so cordially and frankly that Mervyn could not avoid giving his, and returning the duke's shake with heartiness.

"Well, I am glad to see your fortunes in full feather," he continued, as they all sat down with a sudden and

strange cordiality, produced by the magic of a few words. "But look to it, mine ancient friend! court favour is a bird of an early moult. You see, Master Mervyn, I have taken French leave and returned, for I was wearied to death among the Dutch canals and tulips, and cheesecurd women. Ah! beautiful Mistress Sydney, how often did I sigh among them for the refreshment of one glance at your rich and glowing loveliness, animated by the lustre of the bright spirit within!"

And he looked with an expression of such passionate admiration at the youthful lady, that although she smiled, she blushed, and Mervyn felt anything but easy in his chair.

"If I may be allowed to say so, my lord," said Mervyn, after a slight pause, "I fear this unlooked-for return will be rather surprising than agreeable at court, and your enemies will be driven to measures which as yet they had not contemplated."

"I do not study much to pleasure my enemies," replied the duke, haughtily. "And the king, my father, and I trust, the gallant men who pull the oars in the same galleon with me, will see that they do not wreak their spite on me, as they fain would. Besides the peril is mine, and when was Monmouth false in love, or recreant in hate?"

"When he listened to the Lord Shaftesbury's suggestion, and treated a man who loved him and had served him, as an enemy!" replied Mervyn, with sudden warmth.

"Is it possible! then I marvel not at your golden

sash and insignia of slavery, since you know *that*," replied Monmouth. "But Shaftesbury was always overreaching himself, and it was his policy, not mine. I trusted as well as loved you—which you must indeed but too well remember! Well, no more of this! we must be friends at a distance, since fate will have it so. Shaftesbury believes in nothing that is in Heaven above or the earth below; and so his projects are continually failing, for want of a little human credulity and proper confidence in the folly of mankind;—as if all men can see their own interests as clearly as he can!"

"I wish you success, my lord, in all matters but those in which your true friends would have you fail," said Mervyn, in a calmer tone.

"You courtiers take views on all subjects different from those of men who love their country better than the gewgaw glitter of a tinselled livery," said the Lord Russell, glancing with a quiet smile at Mervyn's splendid dress. "But I confess I did not hope to see a garter-blue mantle in this house, where such plain homespun as mine own hath long been the only colour in vogue."

And he looked, not without complacency, at his own simple but rich velvet cloak, of a dark russet brown, the favourite hue of the departed times of the commonwealth.

"I do not appraise men by the colour or quality of their garb, my lord!" replied Mervyn, with vivacity. "For I am not now so young in the world as not to know that the signs which men put outermost are rather what they wish others to believe them, than

what they are; the cowl makes not the monk, my lord!"

"I would I could think so, sir, of you," said the Lord Russell, eagerly, "for you have indeed excellent parts and qualities, of which our unhappy country, in her bleeding condition, hath too much need! May I then hope that you are here, in the house of the noblest patriot whom England owns, not without some intention or wish of serving her in this great emergency of time?"

"I am here on business of the king, my master," said Mervyn, with a moment's hesitation.

"Then, sir, as the friend, and I may almost say brother, of Colonel Sydney, I demand to know what that business is, for you are aware, since a late matter, he will suffer no further intercourse between the palace and his honourable home," said his lordship, authoritatively, yet with great mildness.

"My lord, you forget!—Captain Mervyn saved my life, and I am sure my father would delight in paying his acknowledgments under his own roofs," said Mistress Sydney, in her sweet irresistible manner. "In fact, sir, he would have waited on you in the palace, but that he has made a vow never to enter it till the sealed window of Whitehall be—nay, my lord Duke, I say not *that*—but till the legality of that great constitutional sentence be again acknowledged by a free parliament of England."

"Oh, you are the lion-queller then, Captain Mervyn?" said Monmouth, in a piqued and sarcastic tone. "I marvel you did not kill and eat him too."

"A labourer with a pitchfork had done as well, and a bear-ward with his whip better," said Mervyn, with a calm smile of contemptuous indifference. "But taking it at the best, lady, it was but a Roland for an Oliver; for if the salvation of so poor a life as mine is worth remembering, you saved me when I was drowning in the Thames that night—that dreadful night!"

"An oyster smack had done as much, and a press-barge much more," said Aurora, with a playful smile.

"Oh, the delicious romance!—'tis as daintily contrived as any thing in Clélie or Cassandre; in fact, I never heard of any thing half so good as for a hero and heroine to save each other, turn about!" said Monmouth, with a somewhat tart pleasantry. "And to crown the legend, Master Mervyn, you must turn out the son of the great emperor of Trebizond, lost when a baby by shipwreck on the coast of Flanders, on your way to learn moral philosophy at Athens from one Master Socrates, who had a scolding wife."

"And till then, I exhort your grace, and all other men, to respect the unknown grandeur of my parentage, as much as I respect that which is certainly known of your own," retorted Mervyn, and the Duke flushed dark with his mother's blood in his face, brushed his thick ringlets from his brow, and biting his lip, sat for a moment struck dumb.

"Come, sirs, this is idle raillery," interposed Aurora, smiling, but with evident alarm. "My Lord Russell, I must let you hear your favourite ballad, 'Beauty for-

bear!' on my new Italian virginals, which Mr. Pepys and his swart Florentine musician declare on their souls is the sweetest ever heard."

"But, my Aury, we must away to the conclave—it is time now to follow your father; the coffee-houses will ring with nothing else but the duke's return," said Lord Russell, in the kind indulgent tone of a father to his favourite child. "I could hear you sing that love-lorn ditty all day, and all night too, but time holds not at present; meanwhile I have a word to say to you, darling."

"Then you will come home with my father, and dine with us, and I will sing you both asleep, with that and the dolorous ballad of the 'Nut-brown Maid,' which he loves so well!" said Aurora, deferring with evident inquietude the aside interview thus solicited.

"Oh, we are too many in the game, my Lord Russell," said Monmouth, rising and snatching his hat in a vexed and petted manner. "There are secrets between his majesty and *her* majesty's fair maid-of-honour, which admit not factious witnesses."

"What mean you, my lord?" said Aurora, with sudden dignity, but blushing very deeply.

"Nay, his grace but jests; no man dare utter such words in earnest in my presence," said Lord Russell, calmly. "But what I meant to whisper to you, Aurora, I will now say aloud; that it is not right, nor according to the duty you owe your father's commands, to receive any messages from the king by any of his satellites, however honourable, as in the present instance."

"Of that, my lord, and of my duty to my father, I am the best judge," said Mistress Sydney, with energy. "I reverence you indeed—even as next to him; but *he* has not prohibited me from receiving any message with which it may please their majesties to honour their sometime servant—which indeed would ill become a gentleman of my father's birth—only I have pledged my word I will communicate to him the exact nature of those messages, be they what they will."

"That is enough, child—I know your unbending devotion to truth," said Lord Russell, taking her hand and kissing it with chivalrous delicacy. "And now, Captain Mervyn, if you had aught to communicate which might not bear a parent's inspection, you will do well to return with it as firmly locked in your bosom as at this moment."

"I am not here to defend or accuse myself of such a charge—nor to betray my own nor my master's secrets, if I have any," replied the pupil of the Jesuits, with a bitter smile.

"Then, Aury, we take our leave, for the proceedings will be at a standstill with our absence," replied Lord Russell. "Come, my lord duke! we must be active if we would preserve your grace from the consequences of the dangerous step you have taken."

Monmouth smiled, with a slight curl of his handsome lip and a dilation of the nostrils, as if in contempt of the danger indicated, and made his adieu with the graceful ease of a practised courtier; but as the custom of the times authorized him only to salute the lady's

cheek, Mervyn was enraged to see that he ventured to press her rosy mouth, and with a passionate ardour which vexed her too, for her wavering complexion reddened, and her eyes sparkled with any thing but pleasure. Finally, however, he took his departure with Lord Russell, and as the door closed on their retreating steps, and Mervyn found himself alone with the lady, he would have given the world to have followed them.

There was a minute's profound and most emphatic pause, during which, Aurora seated herself, took up her lacework, set it down, and finally glancing at Mervyn, laughed outright, and with a zest which brought the tears to her bright eyes; and her mirth was very far from diminishing at the troubled and forced attempt which he made to echo it.

"Excuse me, Master Mervyn!—be not afraid of me! I am not mad," said she at last. "But in truth you look as fearfully at me as poor St. George did at my lion—do you remember?—I hope and believe in truth," she added in a graver tone, "that my Lord Russell's suspicions are totally unfounded—for I will not think that the first man over Bothwell Briggs would offer an insult to an old soldier's daughter!—Well, Master Mervyn, you are not perhaps in such a hurry, and will give my new instrument the honour of your appreciation."

She seated herself with enchanting grace at the virginals, and running over the keys, suddenly poured forth a sweet and plaintive old melody, which to Mer-

vyn's tempest-tossed soul seemed a flood of light on a billowy sea. Lost in a luxurious trance of admiration, he gazed in silent rapture on the young siren, and seemed as if he could have gazed for ever without a moment's weariness. But even in this delicious revery of love mingled bitter thoughts and recollections, involuntarily associated with the great resemblance which Aurora bore to her father, softened as it was by the delicate finish which nature loves to bestow on her female creations. The high profile, the perfect nose, the short and somewhat haughty upper lip, the blue intellectual eyes, even the golden auburn of the hair—all were so much her father's, that Mervyn wondered he had never remarked how very perfect the resemblance was.

As she played, Mervyn gazed at her with eyes in which many passions struggled for expression, and alternately conquered each other—love, grief, jealousy, doubt—but still he gazed, and Mistress Sydney was conscious of the survey. Her voice trembled and wandered, her bosom heaved like a frightened swan's, and blush chased blush over her face and neck. Finally, tears gushed to her eyes, and she broke off suddenly, and then turning with a smile and a deeper blush, she exclaimed, "Oh, you must deem me mad, Master Mervyn, but when I think of these rash intrigues, and how my poor father is mixed up in them—but I know you have something to say. Alas! you look like a ghost with a murder on its mind, shaking its head

because one has not courage enough to ask what it means."

"My Lord Russell was right, madam—I *have* a commission from his majesty," said Mervyn, with the obdurate calm of despair.

"A commission!" she exclaimed with vivacity; "it must needs be of Oyer and Terminer, from the solemn grandeur of your manner, Master Mervyn."

"It is perhaps of little less importance, Mistress Sydney," said Mervyn, with tremulous solemnity. "And here are my credentials."

Saying this he produced the casket of jewels, watching her countenance intently as she took it from him; but exceeding surprise, less at the gift than at the bearer, seemed the principal expression. She did but glance at the curiously wrought gold of the casket, and then set it tremblingly down.

"Here is the key, madam; the contents are worthy your inspection," said the young courtier, hurriedly; but as she made no attempt to take it, he opened the casket himself, and produced the glittering contents. Aurora's eye nevertheless seemed riveted on him alone, with an indescribable mingling of indignation and surprise.

"You are mistaken, sir," she said at last, with a cold and unnatural composure. "We are both strangely mistaken! These jewels are meant for Mistress Gwyn or my lady Duchess of Portsmouth—but you would have my opinion on the road? Well, they are fair jewels, but the water is not pure enough for Sydney's daughter—on with them to their destination!"

"I tell you, lady, these glittering gewgaws are from the king—from the monarch of three great realms—to you, and you alone!" replied Mervyn. "But as a mere earnest of his favour—a sample of the mine. I need not tell *you*, lady, that he loves you better than a whole Golconda of such glittering trash! and he swears you do not hate him."

"Are these jewels from the king to me—and are you the bearer?" said Aurora, in a firm but hurried tone.

"I am the bearer, and the jewels are yours," replied Mervyn, folding his arms with stern composure.

The daughter of Sydney raised her eyes, sparkling with indignant lustre, and for the first time she met his gaze unblenchingly, without smile or blush. There was a dead pause of many seconds, which might have been counted by the ticking of the ancient timepiece set in the carved chimney front. At last, coldly sinking her eyes, she said with a slow and sorrowful expression, as if bidding farewell to some long-cherished hope—"I looked to see if it could be the Mervyn whom I remembered. Well, you have deceived some better acquainted with the world's disguises than a simple girl. I am much beholden to his majesty; 'tis a princely gift!" she continued, lifting the jewels, tears standing in heavy dewdrops in her eyes. "How beautiful they are! how they sparkle! yet after all they are only glittering glass, like men's outward show of honour and faith! Will this chain become me, Master Mervyn?" she said, throwing

the string of diamonds on her fair neck, and placing the ruby heart affectedly on her bosom.

"Admirably, madam! pearls for Diana, but diamonds for Venus!" replied the youth, bitterly.

"And what for the go-between, Mercury?" said Aurora. "At what rate doth a man's honesty go, at court? What will a friend's betrayal fetch? At what price do you sell your sisters there? I would not have you go without a reward! Please you, sir, to aid me clasp this marvel of a bracelet. Why, 'tis one mass of lucid glitter."

Mervyn fastened on the bracelet, though his lips whitened and his hand quivered like the needle of a compass.

"And now, sir, may I ask you," she continued, noting his agitation with a woman's quick eye—"may I ask what lucky lightness was it you observed in me, what fortunate sign of utter worthlessness, which encouraged you and your royal master to believe this present would be acceptable to Aurora Sydney?"

"His majesty is notoriously a Solomon in such light matters as women's inclinations, madam," replied Mervyn, excessively piqued. "The whole court observed and noted your favourable acceptance of incense from so great a censer; you cannot play with flame and leave the game unscorched! What particular reasons his majesty hath for believing his adoration not unacceptable at your beauty's shrine, *I* know not, but the general lightness and caprice of your sex, madam—"

"Lightness!—caprice!—my lightness!—my caprice! know you to whom you speak, sir?" exclaimed Aurora, colouring high with indignation. "My lightness! dear Heaven! have I lived to hear those words from your mouth? But go on; more remains unspoken; I see it in your eye; let me know the best of your tidings, if better follow!"

"His majesty," said Mervyn, whose pallid quivering features now presented a curious contrast to the burning glow on the lady's cheek and brow—"the king's majesty—is so encouraged—believes so in your goodness—in short, madam, here is a paper signed by his own royal hand—a blank—fill it up with what conditions you please. A scratch of your pen makes your father a peer, yourself Duchess of Richmond, an escheat which his majesty is anxious to confer on you—wealth, riches, power—a future crown—*but no poisonings, no scaffold!* The queen dead and in her coffin—to be brief—your ladyship may wear her crown."

"Give me the paper, sir; how must I merit these enormous honours and favours?" said Aurora, blushing and paling in rapid alternation. "I cannot fight for the king, plead for the king, corrupt parliaments for the king; what must I do to be thus rewarded by the king, when he suffers the men who bled for him to die of absolute hunger? Alas! I cannot even play your villanous part—bear false witness against my country's patriots, or betray to shame the daughter of the man who saved my life!"

"The service is mighty easy, madam!" replied Mervyn, trembling with anger; "only to love the king, and

to occupy my late Lady Castlemaine's apartments in the palace—that is all."

"Why, I have heard they are right royally furnished, silver damask the meanest hanging!" replied Aurora, with strange calmness. "And is this all? but it must seem little to you; infamy is doubtless hereditary in your family; but I have the misfortune to be descended from a hundred sovereign knights, who have many times made the crown of Scotland sit loose on the brows of *his* ancestors. My grandfather Northumberland's name was Percy, and my father's name is Sydney; that is my only reply. Take back your jewels to your master, and beseech him to confer them on some worthier object, whom his duchies may ennoble; and for yourself, bid him, when he next sends an ambassador on such an errand, let him have an ancestry to disgrace!"

Mervyn stood as if petrified with rage and shame; he could not speak, and Aurora, who was vainly endeavouring in her indignation to unclasp the bracelets, at last burst into tears, and hid her face in an agony of grief in her hands. Then starting suddenly up, she exclaimed, "Fool that I am to show such weakness! 'tis my unripe acquaintance with the world to marvel thus at men's baseness. But you have taught me a great lesson, and I thank you. I took you to be a nobleman of nature's heraldry, but I find you a poor dishonourable slave, whose base soul matches his base birth!"

"Perchance—perchance!" said Mervyn, quivering as if beneath the knife. "But it is impossible that a woman in her senses can reject so magnificent an offer!

Reflect, madam! perchance you throw away a crown! The Catherine of his majesty's ancestor, Harry the Eighth, stood not long in the light of his new love, and—"

"Oh, I comprehend; your wages depend on your success!" said Aurora, vehemently. "Stay, stay—give me the paper; I will certify that you have done your best; you shall not miss your hire." And snatching the paper she wrote with singular steadiness the following words: "These presents are to certify to the king's grace that the villain he employed hath performed his villanous task villanously well.—Aurora Sydney." And then throwing it to Mervyn with the casket, scattering its contents thereby on the floor, she rushed to the door, weeping and sobbing with mingled grief and indignation; but ere she reached it, Mervyn caught her hand in a clutch which seemed of iron.

"I forgot, I forgot—you lack the chain!" she sobbed, making an effort with the other hand to disengage it. "But do not think to frighten me—I am Sydney's daughter—I will not be held, sir! Unhand me, or I call on those who will chastise this insolence—glare at me as you will,—if you were a famished wolf, I fear you not—not any thing after this."

"Hear me, Aurora—you shall hear me!" said Mervyn, vehemently. "Hear me, and for the last time. I have wronged you! I dared to think that power, that wealth, that a king's love, could tempt you; and I—I who would rather turn this vast globe into one great charnel house than suffer another's lips to breathe

the heaven of yours!—I who love you, doat on you, worship you even to the poorest thing you smile on!—I who would die to win one tear of yours on my grave—I have been the tempter! Can you not fathom the black depths of my despair? It was my love, the very desperation and madness of love, which drove me to this trial; but rest satisfied, you are avenged. You have crushed for ever all the hopes which bloomed in the dark desert of my life; and henceforth all is useless, cheerless, barren, and still as death. You have dashed me back into my nothingness. I am now what nature meant me to be when she sent me base-born upon the earth—a reptile for every foot to spurn!"

"It is impossible—you cannot love me, or you would rather have plunged a dagger in your own heart than have done the king's bidding in this matter," said Aurora, vehemently, but allowing herself to be led back to her seat.

"Not love you! not love you!" he repeated, wildly. "Oh, I have loved you all my life, before even I saw you, for are you not the imbodied form of all those vague dreams of beauty which haunted my earliest childhood!—which I sought yearningly, but oh, how vainly, in all things that partake of the divine spirit of beauty—the lustrous darkness of night, the glory of noonday, the all-reflecting ocean of poetry in which the universe mirrors itself!—eloquence, battle, music, pleasure!—in all have I found the same deep void which only love can fill. Not love you!" he continued with wild fervour, and throwing himself on his knees, cover-

ing both her hands with burning kisses. "Oh, Aurora! I swear it! I love you better a million times than myself —better than all things else, here or hereafter."

"Go and tell the king so, and I will believe you," said Aurora, still weeping without intermission. "Till then—but that is for ever—farewell!"

She made an effort to shake her hand loose, but Mervyn still held it clasped in his own. "You shall not leave me," he said; "you shall not leave me in utter desperation. I am a beggar, a base-born slave it is true —but I am human! Say only you forgive me—that you believe me!"

"I will not—I will be forced to nothing, sir!" she exclaimed, and at that moment the sound of approaching footsteps was heard. "Oh, rise, rise!" she continued in agony. "It is my father—I know his step—rise, rise!"

"Never—till you pronounce my forgiveness! I cannot die better than now and here, if he slay me!"

"Well, well, I forgive you and believe you—only tell the king I hate him," she said, hurriedly, and he sprang up, pressing her hand to his pale lips; but at the same moment the door swung open, and three or four gentlemen made their appearance, foremost of whom was Colonel Sydney.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DUELLO UNDER THE ANCIEN REGIME.

SUDDENLY as Mervyn arose, it was too late to shun detection, and he stood as if lightning-struck, while Aurora vainly attempted to hide her gushing tears.

"Heyday, what is here?" exclaimed Sydney, after a petrified silence of several minutes, his eye glancing from his daughter to Mervyn, and thence to the jewels which lay scattered on the floor.

"Nothing, nothing, dearest father!—nothing but that Master Mervyn asked my opinion on these jewels, and—and—I overset the casket."

"And this chain—how came it round your neck, Aurora?—and these bracelets?" said Sydney. "Why by Heaven, I saw these diamonds at the king's jeweller's. What manner of knave is this, here, flaunting his base livery in my house?"

"It is the gentleman of whom we spoke—but be calm, Sydney!" said the Lord Russell. "I see it all; doubtless this is a present from the king!"

"And you have accepted it, girl!" thundered Sydney, turning colourless with passion.

"Judge yourself, Colonel Sydney," said Mervyn, in a mood of tranquil desperation, and handing the carte blanche which Aurora had filled up in such bitter terms. Sydney glanced at the signature, and his eyesight seemed almost to fail him, for he gave it to Russell, exclaiming, "Read it!" in a deep and gasping tone. But Monmouth, who was also there, snatched and read it aloud, with strong emphasis on every epithet. Brave as he was by constitution, Mervyn trembled when the colonel turned his flashing eyes upon him.

"Spy! slave! seducer!" shouted he, at the pitch of his powerful voice. "Think you this roof shall protect such baseness, thou worthy son of the blackest scoundrel in England!—draw!"

And his sword flashed at Mervyn's breast, but the young courtier neither drew nor budged a single inch.

"No, no!—he did it but to try me," shrieked Aurora, clinging to her father's arm, but he dashed her aside with violence, and, before any one could interfere, again his sword wavered within a hair's breadth of Mervyn's breast, but he never flinched.

"Strike, Colonel Sydney," he said, calmly folding his arms. "I acknowledge that these jewels are from the king, that I brought them, and that your daughter

here has rejected them with scorn. Strike!—I shall not balk your stroke."

"No, colonel, this is matter for a younger sword!" exclaimed Monmouth, advancing and drawing his with a graceful flourish.

"Howard, aid me—they are both mad!" exclaimed Lord Russell. "Colonel Sydney, this is neither the place nor time—for Heaven's sake, consider—your daughter's reputation must needs suffer in any such brawl, be the truth as it may!"

"This pandarous rogue is not fit food for a gentleman's sword," said Howard, with supreme contempt, and insolence of manner. "Rogues like these are best corrected by the cudgels of one's valets—ho, Ralph, John, Ducas!"

"Fly, fly, Mervyn, if you would not kill me!" said Aurora, clinging wildly to her father. "Oh, go, go—on your lives, let him pass!" she exclaimed, as two or three lackeys, headed by the grayhaired butler, ran in, alarmed by the uproar.

"Kick the villain out, and send his trash after him!" shouted Sydney. "He hath insulted my daughter—at him, rascals!"

"Prithee, sirs, value your lives so far as not to come within arm's length!" said Mervyn, with a demure ferocity of manner which effectually stopped the warlike advance of the lackeys. "Farewell, colonel; you will hear me some day when you have more leisure, and perhaps it shall be found I was not deserving of this bitter rebuke. Farewell, lady—I have ever ho-

noured you, and will to the latest breath of my ever luckless life."

"Stay, sir, take your jewels with you, and my daughter's certificate—you may insert it in your patent of nobility," said Sydney, mastering his passion with a strong effort, and dropping the point of his weapon. He then tore rather than took the chain and bracelet from his daughter, who stood passively, and white as snow with terror, and heaping them all into the casket, threw them towards the unfortunate bearer. Meantime Mervyn, who felt that indignation was rapidly getting the better of his reason, made his way to the door, with his hand on the hilt of his sword—but no one offered him obstruction. He crossed the lawn at a leisurely pace, and as he went he thought he could hear Monmouth's bitter laugh. As he leaped into the saddle, the butler ran to him with the casket, and muttered something which Mervyn neither heard nor heeded, but snatching the casket, he dashed the spurs into his horse, and was almost instantly out of sight.

To analyze the confused thoughts which crowded upon him during his gallop to Whitehall would be almost impossible. Burning resentment at the insults which had been heaped upon him; wonder at his own folly or baseness in undertaking an office which had so justly drawn them down; amazement at the strange avowal into which he had rushed, of a passion which until that moment he had never imagined held such powerful sway in his breast—whose existence he scarcely acknowledged to himself;—all these feelings assailed

him by turns and in masses. The light in which his conduct must appear to Sydney and his daughter, struck him with a new and appalling glare, and yet withal, the certainty which he now had of Aurora's contempt for his royal rival was in itself a consolation for every ill. Then he reflected with bitter and gnawing shame on the avowal he had made, that he—the outcast beggar and bastard—had dared to love a descendant of the princely Sydneys, the grand-daughter of the great Northumberland! That she had not spurned him with supreme scorn, he only imputed to the dominion of the previous emotion he had raised in her proud heart, whose intensity absorbed all minor passions.

Anon Mervyn's thoughts concentered into one focus —hatred of his imperial rival; and he determined instantly to make him a sharer in the misery he had caused. On arriving at the palace, however, he found that the king had set off suddenly to Oxford, to open the parliament which he had summoned there—the last of his reign. The sudden return of the Duke of Monmouth, and tidings of the bold projects afoot in the powerful party which supported him, had precipitated this departure by a few hours. But Chiffinch remained, with instructions that Captain Mervyn was to follow the king to Oxford immediately. The latter made no delay, and the next morning saw him entering the ancient city.

Short as the sitting had as yet been, the parliament had exhibited the most refractory spirit; it was evi-

dently in the hands of the popular party, who seemed resolved to push their victory to the farthest bounds. The Commons elected an obnoxious speaker, quarrelled with the Lords on Fitzharris's impeachment, and introduced their beloved bill, excluding the Duke of York from the succession.

Mervyn found the usually quiet and monastic city changed into an arena of tumult, and crowded with armed men, for the London members went to Oxford with a numerous body of well-appointed horse. Parties seemed pretty equally divided in the commonalty, the exclusionists being distinguished by purple ribbons in their hats, with a lackered tin label of "No Popery! No Slavery!"

Mervyn found the king taking his chocolate, and still in his brocade morning gown and slippers, attended by two or three of his unpopular ministers, and some of the loyal gentlemen of the neighbourhood. He seemed to be in a very moody temper, speaking to no one, and the courtiers were whispering around, none daring to break the silence, when Mervyn entered. Charles noticed him directly from his riding-dress, which he had not time to change, and a smile suddenly lighted up his dark features. "So, Master Mervyn, from your mission, ha?" he exclaimed. "What news, good or bad?"

"Nay, very bad, my liege," replied Mervyn. "Your hawk gentle has proved a haggard, and the falconers cannot lure her to the jesses with whistle or meat."

"Say you so, Master Mervyn?" replied Charles, scanning his pale and care-worn features attentively. "Well, though it be unjust, 'tis the world's way—to reward the messenger according to his tidings, so thine will be something less than a dukedom."

He then rose, and making a sign to the courtiers, all retired, making a profound obeisance; only Mervyn remained, and the king, with an appearance of much emotion, desired him to relate all that had happened. It may be readily imagined that the youth kept nothing concealed but his own outburst in the affair; not a single phrase of contempt used by Sydney or his daughter escaped his vigilant memory; insomuch that Charles stared at him in dumb amazement. It was a sort of balm to his own wound to enlarge on these unpleasant particulars, and his satisfaction increased when he saw how Charles smarted under the lash. His swarthy complexion grew of a fiery red when Mervyn produced the paper and the casket of jewels, and he smiled with a dark and revengeful bitterness when he read Aurora's "certificate."

"God's life! these people grow too insolent," he said, at last, folding the paper. "But the time is coming when they shall know who is master in England; and I swear I will so avenge me on this presumptuous daring brood of Sydneys, that men shall in after times quote them for a proverb of royal vengeance. But think not, Master Mervyn, though you discourage me so much, that I will give up my chase. I have now the addi-

tional motive of revenge, and I needed none to spur me on to impossibilities rather than fail in subduing this haughty beauty. You may retire, Master Mervyn."

The young courtier obeyed, and during the remainder of the short stay of the court in Oxford, Charles took little notice of him, and his favour was obviously on the decline.

Meanwhile, Shaftesbury and his colleagues obstinately pressed their bill, against the declared resolution of the king, and it had passed the second reading when Charles resolved on that extraordinary measure which is one of the phenomena of his reign—the dissolution of a parliament which had scarcely met. This surprising step of prerogative suddenly broke all the plans of the popular party, dispersed their powerful union, and put an abrupt termination to the intrigues and crafty machinations of Shaftesbury. The court returned immediately to London, leaving Oxford in a state of the wildest uproar.

The day after Mervyn's return to Whitehall, a new trouble, on which he had not hitherto calculated, joined itself to his previous embarrassments. A large pile of bills for various articles of dress, and his splendid uniform, lay upon his table, with modest requests for payment. Now, although Mervyn was ostensibly in the receipt of a very handsome salary, he had not received a single broad piece of it; and such was the utter confusion and disorganization of the government, that it seemed very doubtful whether he ever should. His brain was holding a sort of committee of ways and

means, not with the romantic hope of discharging the mass, but in assigning little sums as a put-off to each, when an unexpected visiter made his appearance. This was the Lord Howard, glittering in one of those magnificent garbs in which he delighted, of violet velvet and silver, which showed off his figure to advantage, for he was still remarkably handsome, though worn with deep traces left by a long course of profligacy.

"Bon jour, mon cher," he said, throwing himself negligently into a chair.

"My lord," said Mervyn, after a moment's surprise, "allow me to ask to what I am indebted for the undeserved pleasure of your society, which I meant at another time to have desired in another place, for I am by no means satisfied with the part it pleased you to take in a recent transaction."

"I did not intend to please you, Master Mervyn, but myself, in that," replied Howard, coolly. "I wait upon you on behalf of Colonel Sydney; choose your weapon, but if the sword hits your fancy, here is the length of my friend's, and the breadth too."

"On behalf of Colonel Sydney!" repeated Mervyn with a start.

"Ay, you are not so surprised at that, Master Mervyn," said Howard. "You must needs have conjectured that the colonel would not put up with such an affront as you have offered to his beautiful daughter; and since your principal is too high to be got at, you must fight as well as woo for him."

"I am content, my lord, to do so against all the men in England, but Colonel Sydney—yourself in particular!" said Mervyn, fiercely.

"I am obliged to you for the preference, sir," replied Howard, calmly, "but at present I must do my duty to my employer, and I request you to choose your weapons."

"I will not fight Colonel Sydney," said Mervyn, with feigned indifference.

"Not fight him, sir! then he will cane you in some public presence," said Howard, vehemently.

"Tell Colonel Sydney from me," replied Mervyn, with visible agitation, "that I am not so guilty as he supposes, but I cannot as yet prove mine innocence; meanwhile I will not, to save my life, lift my sword against his."

"Nonsense, it will not do; Aurora has failed to make her father believe this stuff, and how should you?" said Howard, scoffingly.

"But tell the colonel," continued Mervyn, "if he will send me any other opposite, yourself, or a better man, I will fight a summer's day to pleasure him."

"Bah! bah! you are not fool enough to expect it, or think to balk the affair with this blustering dastardy," replied Howard.

"Draw then, or you are no better than a dead dog!" shouted Mervyn, now thoroughly enraged, and springing up he drew his sword with a flash.

"Not here, certainly; I am not to be fooled into having my hand struck off for drawing in the king's

purlieu," said Howard, neither rising nor assuming any attitude of defence. "But if you are really serious, Master Mervyn, and will not fight with Colonel Sydney at any price, I accept your challenge, for I shall be most proud and happy to do Miss Sydney justice on your insolent bastardship, and to appear in the lists as her champion."

"This evening then—in the Mall!" exclaimed Mervyn, colouring darkly. "Promise me, or you shall not stir from this chamber."

"I do promise, but from no terror of your threats," replied Howard; "I shall see Colonel Sydney in an hour, in the city, where we are to meet on this matter of the dissolution; and I can readily put him off with some excuse, as that you are in close attendance on the king at present. But hist! what is that at the door?—'tis something louder than a wench's rap."

Mervyn sheathed his sword hurriedly as the door opened, and a tall figure, wrapped in a long military cloak, his countenance concealed by a black visor and a hanging plume, stepped boldly in. He started back a step or two when he saw that a stranger was present, but Mervyn readily recognised the king, by his peculiar gait, and the momentary opening of his mantle which revealed his rich garb beneath. Chiffinch was behind, in a plain burgher dress, as was usual with him when he attended the king on his private excursions, of which, like Haroun al Raschid, but seldom with such good motives, he was very fond.

"Come in, Master Fenton," said Mervyn, with

ready intelligence, "here is only a gentleman who is taking his good company away, and you have come in time to share my tediousness."

Charles glanced scrutinizingly at the figure before him, and slightly raising his hat, threw himself into a chair at the window, whence he looked perseveringly until the Lord Howard departed, which he did after a survey which fully repaid the royal curiosity. Mervyn escorted him to the head of the stairs with ceremonious civility, and as they parted, requested him to expect him at the place of appointment till dark, as he did not know how long he might be detained by the king.

"Was that old Charley then? I thought so," replied Howard, smiling. "But how he alters in every thing, even in person! His face grows blacker and blacker, like his heart, and his debauched youth will have the cruel and remorseless age of Tiberius, if we do not choke him betimes. They say he has already got his island of Caprea in these Mulberry Gardens, ostensibly kept by that infernal hag of a witch-devil, old Moll Creswold!"

Mervyn paid little attention to this effusion of loyalty, for he was absorbed in conjectures on the king's business with him in his disguise, and he returned immediately.

"Yonder was my Lord Howard, ha, Mervyn?" said the king, sharply, as he re-entered. "I thought no friend of mine consorted with such a rank rogue of the faction as that, ha! But Chiffinch is, I am afraid, right; you are but half-hearted with us, Master Mervyn, and think to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds at

once! This will not do; he who is not with me, heart and soul, is against me heart and soul, and I will trample him or he shall me."

"The Lord Howard is no friend of mine, sire," replied Mervyn; "so far to the contrary that he but now was here with a challenge from Colonel Sydney, for the part I took lately in your majesty's behalf."

"A challenge—umph!—and you have accepted it of course?" said Charles, with an earnest look at his young captain. "By Heaven, Mervyn, you could not do me a better service at this moment than to rid me of that old pestilent right honourable Don Quixote Junius Brutus of a cursed old leveller and Cromwell man, with his republic in the air, and his dangerous projects on earth."

"No, sire, I have refused his challenge; I cannot raise my sword against the man who saved my life," said Mervyn, with affected calmness.

"Saved your life—truly, truly," said Charles, with evident displeasure. "I heard for the first time from Chiffinch that your intimacy at Mistress Sydney's had been of such long standing; and there are not wanting those, Master Mervyn, who insinuate that your pleading the other day injured your client rather than your reputation for eloquence."

Mervyn coloured deeply, but he made no reply, and Charles seemed still more restless and dissatisfied.

"Why man," he said, "Colonel Sydney will think little of caning you some day in the park, or at the playhouse, or mayhap in my very presence, if you refuse to

meet him like a man! But I warrant we will bring down his pride some of these fine days, and make him glad to market his submission, since he can do no better. But put on your cloak, Mervyn; we are for a sally to the Mulberry Gardens, for old mother Hecate there writes me word she has added a fresh young rose to her garden."

This was the first time that Mervyn had ever been asked to accompany the king on those scandalous rambles, in which he too frequently indulged, and though his heart swelled high with loathing, he did not venture on a refusal. But Charles noticed his hesitation.

"Come, Chiffinch," he said, with a malicious smile. "I trust we shall put Master Mervyn in better humour with his excursion, when he knows whom we shall see at the end of it. Guess me my new love's name, and if you hit on the right one within the hour, I will make you a Knight of the Garter at Whitsuntide."

Mervyn mentioned a variety of those to whom he had seen the king pay attention, but not the right one, as appeared from the extravagant peals of laughter into which both his page and himself burst.

"Thou wouldst guess wrong till Whitsuntide," he said, at last; "'tis even thy impenetrable rock of virtue, Aurora Sydney!"

Had it not been that Charles's attention was turned on the glittering river below, he must have augured strange things from the start and sudden paleness which covered Mervyn's face. As it was, the tone in which he

pronounced the word "Impossible!" struck him and he turned.

"You shall see that anon, Master Mervyn," replied Charles, coldly. "I mean not to say that she is there by her own good will, but she is there."

"But by what marvellous contrivance," exclaimed Mervyn.

"It is all Chiffinch's work, aided by cunning old Creswold," replied Charles, and the gratified page bowed joyfully to the royal glance of approbation. "Sydney is at one of the factious meetings in the city, and Chiffinch got a Jew, one Elkanah, to imitate the colonel's hand (which he can do marvellously of all men) and writes word that chancing to meet you on the way, Master Mervyn! swords were drawn, and you came off the better, leaving the old gentleman for dead on the path. But some charitable squire picks him up, and removes him to his own house, where he lies in great danger; and sends two or three lackeys with his coach to bring the lady directly. And so off comes Mistress Aurora in a fit of distraction, and is now safely lodged at Madam Creswold's."

Mervyn grew still paler, but his resolution was taken. Decision was one of the marked peculiarities of his character, and the pupil of the Jesuits perceived that on this occasion it must display itself in act but not in word. He even enforced a smile, and protested that it was the most excellent plot he had yet heard of among all those that plotting age produced. Charles ex-

changed a bitter smile with his obsequious page, and then arose to proceed on his laudable enterprise. Mervyn threw a cloak over his own dress, and followed.

They left the palace by a back way, and found a hired coach waiting at the door, into which they got, and the driver was directed to the Mulberry-gardens.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MULBERRY-GARDENS.

THE gardens distinguished by the above pleasant epithet were at one period the favourite resort of sober citizens and their wives, who went to enjoy the delicious fruit for which they were long famous; but the corruption of the age had involved even this innocent and rational pleasure, and the Mulberry-gardens were now frequented only by the dissolute of both sexes. They occupied the present site of Buckingham Palace, and on the descent towards St. James's, stood a house which had once belonged to some ancient and honourable family, but was now in possession of Mrs. Creswold. It had a peculiar garden of its own, separated from the Mulberry groves by a high park paling; and after passing through the former, they arrived at a wicket which admitted them into the immediate purlieus of the mansion.

Charles led the way with a practised step, through the windings of a small but very beautiful garden, gathering as he went a nosegay of sweet flowers. He seemed to be in the gayest humour possible, and Mervyn followed in a mood of resolved desperation, which even allowed him to laugh and bandy wit with the king, the better to conceal the purpose in his heart.

A tall building, with high gables and projecting windows, stood at the end of a row of elms, and up that they wended their way. As they proceeded an old woman, hobbling on crutches, appeared hastening to meet them. Her real age might be about forty, but she looked nearly a score older, and her body was bent almost double. Her whole countenance was one continued pucker of wrinkles, and the skin lay in bags round her jaws, while her lips had the fiery freshness, and her eye the moist sparkle of perpetual intoxication. A heap of tattered gray hairs hung round her head, half hidden by a mob cap, but she was very grandly bedizened in laces and velvet. This was Moll Creswold; but how changed by disease and debauchery from her whom we introduced at the beginning of this history, young, fresh, and handsome!

"Oh, Mr. Rowley, such a to-do!" exclaimed the beldame, as she approached. "Such a to-do!—I thought I must have gone distracted!"

"Why, how now, goody?" said Charles, sharply.

"Oh, dear!—the poor thing has been in faintings ever since she arrived and found out the trick! 'Twas as much as we could do to keep her alive—in vain I

pointed out her happiness—she would not hear me, and she is now sobbing and crying like the rain."

"Poor soul! I must go and comfort her," said Charles, putting his nosegay coquettishly in his breast. Mervyn's heart swelled high, but he said not a word. Charles looked at his compressed and bloodless features, and motioned to Chiffinch, who, with evident reluctance, made up to Mervyn, and invited him to eat some fruit and drink a bottle of wine with him in an arbour at hand, which was laid out with some such preparations. Mervyn nodded mechanically, and with a smile full of hate and scorn, Charles turned away, muttering, "Io triumphe!" in a low but very audible tone. He then went on with Mrs. Creswold for guide.

The young courtier watched his master in profound silence till he disappeared in the house, and Chiffinch trembled, though he pretended to eat some peaches in the arbour very diligently. But when Mervyn turned, he involuntarily started.

"Master Chiffinch, you seem fond of peaches," said he, in a tone of calm determination. "Continue to eat, and no harm shall happen to you—but dare to follow me one only step, raise but the least alarm, and I will return and stab you a million times with this dagger." And he drew a long poniard from his belt.

"Lord save us, Master Mervyn! you do not intend to harm the king's majesty?" said Chiffinch, shrinking down with fear.

"I will save Aurora Sydney, though it cost all the kings on earth!" said Mervyn, his eyes sparkling with rage, and striding forward.

"Master Mervyn, look to it!—you ruin yourself, and do no good to Miss Sydney!" exclaimed Chiffinch, clutching his cloak, but relinquishing it instantly as the youth turned fiercely round. "Prithee, glare not at me like a mad tiger—I tell you, as a friend, Master Mervyn, your interference will only bring down ruin on your own head. The king is informed of all your treasons, and it is to revenge himself on you that he has brought you to be as it were an abettor in his success. But if you take it quietly and behave like a reasonable man, Master Mervyn, his majesty will doubtless pardon you, and—"

"Wretch, slave! withdraw your loathsome hand, or I do the hangman's business on you and smite it off!" shouted Mervyn.

"I warn you, sir!—the house is haunted by a banditti who would as soon throttle you as dogs a rat!" exclaimed Chiffinch.

"I care not—avoid me, toad, viper, reptile!" said Mervyn, dashing him back with violence, and striding rapidly up the avenue.

"He will do some madness—the strong idiot!" groaned Chiffinch. "Master Mervyn, for your own sake, rush not on destruction. 'Tis scarce a fortnight since groping about in the dark I found a fellow hanging in one of their wardrobes, and his body was doubtless shoved into a dusthole without a soul on earth being the wiser, Master Mervyn!"

But he had disappeared behind some trees, and after a moment of intense deliberation, Chiffinch determined

to follow him at a respectful distance, hoping that the young man's rashness would have cooled ere he reached the house.

Mervyn, however, arrived at the portal, in a mood of increased instead of flagging desperation. It was completely overhung with vine and honeysuckles, which filled the air with a sweet perfume, though he heeded it not; but on attempting the door, he found that it was double barred within. Conscious that it would be useless to try and enter by legitimate means, he looked round for some window by which to enter; but he found all those within reach secured by massive iron bars. His quick eye, however, noticed a slender staircase window at a considerable height, close to which waved the topmost branches of a fine cherry-tree. His resolution was taken instantly. Clambering among the branches with the vigorous activity of youth and passion, he gained some of the highest, which were so slender that they seemed scarcely able to bear a child's weight, and then by a desperate spring he caught the sill of the window. Here he hung for a moment at full length, but by means of the projecting ornaments below, he gained a footing. Luckily the window was open, but so narrow that it was with difficulty he thrust himself through.

He found himself in a high landing-place, which terminated in a flight of dark stairs, down which he passed without a moment's pause, and found himself in an open gallery. At the same time he thought he heard the king's voice, and listening attentively, he dis-

tinguished that he was speaking in a low soothing tone, interrupted by sobs, apparently of the person addressed, and then he plainly heard the abominable blandishing voice of Creswold, which sounded like one who was coaxing another into taking poison. Mervyn had no doubt that these speakers composed the group he sought, and following the sound, he reached a sort of gilded balcony, overlooking a small but very beautiful garden; fenced in by high palings, surrounded by a broad moat, overhung by willows, beyond which were the extensive woodlands and park of Clarendon House, or Hyde Park as it has since been denominated.

Immediately below Mervyn's point of sight was a spectacle which enchained his eyes, and filled his heart with grief and indignation. Reclining in a state of insensibility in an arm-chair, in which they seemed to have borne her to the open air, lay the peerless form of Aurora Sydney, her fair hair hanging in dishevelled masses, her dress disordered, and her countenance pale as marble. Charles, Creswold, and a number of gaudily dressed women stood about in various attitudes, with cordials, burned feathers, vinegar, and other restoratives.

Mervyn's first impulse was to leap the balcony into the garden below; but suddenly a thought interposed that plucked him back. What right had he to interfere?—and how did he know that his interference would be approved even by the lady herself? All that he had seen might be but a farce, a resistance meant only to increase the violence of the passion it opposed. He

stood fixed, and in a moment took a new resolution, which was to ascertain Aurora's real motives and intentions before he took upon him the Quixotic enterprise of rescuing her.

"Nonsense, chitty! what folly is this, chicken?" said Creswold, as the lady, reviving slowly, stared around in the wildest terror, and then with a shriek of utter despair, burst into a passion of tears and sobs. "Ya stand in your own light if ya but knew it. A' should like to know what lady in the land would refuse such a chance an she had it? Lawk-a-mercy! 'tis next to being queen of broad England, and better too, for one's the substance and the other's the shadow. What a to-do about nothing! I should like to know, madam, if you consider yourself better than all the ladies of the court put together? And keep your own secret and no one will be the wiser. Oh, if you only knew what I know, ya'd see it only takes a little caution to be as virtuous as the best of them, marry come up! But, Master Rowley, I *am* ashamed to see you on your knees like a great bashful boy, when——"

"Tut, dame, what can I do?—she is fretting herself into fits," said Charles. "Dearest Aurora, be not afraid, for on my soul I love you! Marry, what can put the little mouse in such a tremour, seeing that, though her king, I own myself the humblest of her slaves."

"Restore me to my father, sire!" sobbed Aurora. "I will not stay here another moment—I will rather die! Where is my father? I do not love you, I hate you. I will see my father. Oh, you have betrayed me

here, wretches, but Sydney will rouse all England to rescue me. You had better let me go, indeed you had! and I will tell no one, I swear I will not! Oh, why, why have you brought me to this horrible place?"

"Horrible place, quotha!" exclaimed Creswold. "Marry, and I should like to see a handsomer or better conducted 'stablishment on this side the water! Horrible place, hear ye!"

"Peace, hag!" said Charles, sharply, and changing his tone into one of humble deference he continued—"Why have I brought you here? Alas, dearest creature, need you ask a question which your own heart must sufficiently answer? Because I love you, dote on you, worship you, because I value you more than my crown, more than life itself. Yet be not fearful! I mean you no harm; your father is in no danger. I swear, I would rather die than suffer one hair of that beautiful head to be injured. But I want you to hear me, to hear reason. I know that the traitor Mervyn, far from pleading my cause, for which I bribed the renegade, endeavoured to supplant me—"

"Bribe him! not with your crown!" exclaimed Aurora, turning with flashing eyes upon the monarch. "His honourable soul would have scorned, loathed, despised me below all calculation had he found that I yielded but a hair's breadth of encouragement to your infamous passion, king!"

"You are mad, lady!" said Charles, darkening with anger. "Deem you that ever a courtier preferred his honour to his interest? And if he pretended to love you

all on the sudden, as I am told he did, it was in the romantic hope of some day wedding the rich and beautiful Duchess of Richmond, which I promised to make you, and do still, on condition that you listen favourably to the suit of a man who is willing to make you even the Queen of England!"

"On the sudden, say you on the sudden?" interrupted Aurora, with vehemence. "He loved me ever, from that moment of horror and danger in which we met for the first time! Which among you ventured his life to save mine, but he alone, at that dreadful feast at Windsor? And hear me, sir, hear me, and if you have a man's heart release me on the instant. I tell you, I love him too! and I will die as many deaths as cruelty can devise, ere I will be false to him in the poor particular of but one smile that should be his!"

"Rantatara! who ever heard such a jubilate?" cried Mrs. Creswold. "Marry, an it were me I would soon bring her down from her high flights. A'd teach her to come to the whistle."

Charles seemed to pause as if making an effort to control his wrath, but there was one within hearing to whom every word of that passionate outburst was sweeter than the most eloquent music.

"Madam," said Charles, in a tone of forced calm, "I am obliged to you for making me so unreservedly your confidant. I shall know what toad to crush that mars my strawberries. You say you love this shoe-tie of mine, this skip-jack of my court, Mervyn? I seek your advancement; do you seek his. On your resolution depends even his

life! This is no age of scruple-weighing justice; and you may remember that he lent a helping hand in Godfrey's murder. Refuse me and I will bring his head to the block, as surely as ever your father and his friends brought those of mine;—accept me, and I will make him your husband, with a dukedom for your dowry!"

There was a pause after this extraordinary proposal, a pause of deep and unbroken silence for nearly a minute, and Mervyn's eyes were fixed on Aurora in intense expectation. Charles was standing in an attitude of earnest entreaty, but the look and manner of Aurora, the overwhelming scorn and indignation which illuminated her beauty with a kind of celestial fierceness and scorn, the curved lips, the beautiful nostrils instinct with contempt, presented an appearance which was sublime in its passion and beauty.

"For whom do you take me and him, king?" she said at last in a tone of withering scorn. "Are you a man, and dare you think that a man could be so base as to accept such fathomless infamy? Hark you, sir!—sooner than be the thing you would make me, I would cheerfully share all that poverty hath of contempt and bitterness, as the wedded wife of the man I loved, though he were the poorest beggar that ever looked up to the sun to curse its light in the desperation of his misery."

"More fool you, child; ya'd a find hard crusts break a body's teeth," said Creswold, sneeringly.

"You then reject my offer, which I will never repeat," said Charles, with gloomy solemnity. "Mark

me, girl! you are no longer coquetting with the good-humoured careless king, the Merry Monarch, as they call me in Whitefriars! A change has come over my nature—your faction has at last made me the tyrant they have so long represented me. The Stuart blood in my veins, which was wont to flow so lithesomely, is thickening into a fluid as black as Nero's! I swear to you I will have your lover's head— and the heads of half England—if you dare prefer any one to me."

"I have but one answer for you, sire," replied Aurora, in a less excited tone. "I am Sydney's daughter, and I will die rather than dishonour his name. In mercy's name, do not drive me to that pass!"

"Well, well, don't make such a potherum," interposed Mrs. Creswold; "different people have different tastes, but if so be I was his majesty—well, you quality-people don't like to give things their proper names, but I'd soon see how long I'd stand listening to a frothy round-head oration from the daughter of one of my father's cut-throats. I should like to know what mercy Colonel Sydney showed to his martyred majesty of blessed memory, when he voted his head off his shoulders!"

"Leave us, Mrs. Creswold," said Charles, striding hastily up and down the grassplot like a man that is forming his resolution with difficulty. "I am resolved —I have determined—you *shall* hear reason, Mistress Sydney! You are wholly in my power. Creswold, take your women and yourself away, while I strive to reason this pretty piece of obduracy into common sense."

"There's old Rowley again!—as well be hanged for

a sheep as for a lamb," said the beldame with great glee, and making a signal to the women, they all trooped off to the house. But Aurora sprang after them, and seizing Mrs. Creswold by her bunchy sacque, she exclaimed in a voice of the wildest consternation—

"You shall not leave me alone with this wicked man!—I will go with you—Oh, do not, do not leave me, dear, dear Mrs. Creswold!"

"Nonsense, child, you are a little simpleton, and don't know your own luck," said Creswold, blandishingly. "Come, come! you rumple my good new sacque with your clutching—take her off, Master Rowley, and away with me, wenches."

But Aurora clung with frantic energy to the old woman, and even flung her arms round her neck, shrieking and imploring compassion; and Charles, irritated by her resistance, tore her away in his arms with violence, and smothered her cries with his licentious kisses.

In her distraction, Aurora called on her father and on Heaven alternately, and at last on Mervyn! Whether it was that she caught a glimpse of him, or merely from the instinct of despair—but as she pronounced the name it seemed as if it was a spell to bring him from the earth, for he was by her side with the rapidity of lightning. In an instant Charles's embrace was wrenched off, with a violence to which his royalty was but little accustomed, and Aurora was clutched to Mervyn's breast with all the energy of love and desperation.

Creswold and the women, as well as Charles himself,

stood for a moment as if petrified by the suddenness of the apparition.

"Villain! what means this insolence?" said Charles, at last, staring amazedly at the fierce countenance of the youth before him, no longer a submissive courtier but an exasperated rival.

"It means that your majesty is but a man, and I am but another," replied Mervyn; "and with this advantage, that I am honest, and you are a villain and a tyrant; and if you doubt my word, advance but one foot farther to harm this fair innocent, and try if your royal skin be adamant against my poniard."

"And are you, sir, the new Don Quixote to repair wrongs?" said Charles, furiously. "If so, unsheathe that iron, which methinks you keep something carefully in the scabbard. Ha, traitor! do you draw on the king?"

And with a rapidity which, under the circumstances, was treacherous, Charles drew his rapier, and made so sudden a pass at Mervyn, that he had only time to strike it aside from the breast by catching it in the fleshy part of his arm, which it pierced with a sensation of exquisite pain. Charles withdrew the blade instantly, intending to strike again at his heart, but Mervyn closed with him, shaking off Aurora, who fell shrieking between them. He managed to seize the rapier by the hilt, and twisting it from Charles's grasp, dashed him staggering to some distance, and then stepping over the lady, he stood brandishing the weapon and prepared for mortal combat. But the desperation which glittered in his eye apparently

overawed his antagonist, and he stood shaking his fist and yelling with rage. Meanwhile Creswold shouted, "Help" and "Murder" at the pitch of her dissonant voice, but seemed not to venture any personal interference.

"Mervyn, Mervyn—oh, save me! let us fly this way—this way!" exclaimed Aurora, as her valorous defender raised her. She was evidently frantic with alarm, and dragged his arm and pointed to the portal. But a new apparition suddenly prohibited that exit;—two powerful ruffians, or swash-bucklers as they were technically called, with drawn swords and round shields, made their appearance, urged on by Chiffinch, who, however, kept becomingly in the rear.

"Cut down the cully, he plays at false dice!" yelled Creswold, pointing at Mervyn. "Cut him down—you have the king's warrant—cut him down."

"No, no, take the girl from him, and kick him out of window," said Charles, "or rather keep him prisoner in an outhouse till I have time to adjudge him something worthier of his merits."

The ruffians made a few steps forward, but they seemed to hesitate.

"Release me, dearest Mistress Sydney!" said Mervyn, calmly but desperately—"release me while I deal with these people—if I fall I die happy since it is for you."

"We will die together," replied Aurora, wildly. "I could not survive you—let us die together. But surely something human must be within hearing.—Help, mur-

der, help!" and she shrieked at the highest pitch of her voice.

"Come, my master, you had better go quietly, instead of having your throat cut," said the foremost ruffian.—"Release the girl and go about your business, if that's all it's about, mother?"

"Curse you, cut his throat!" yelled Creswold. "What do you mean, you villain!—to let him bring the mob down upon us?"

"Make way, scoundrels!" said Mervyn, grasping the hand of Mistress Sydney, and resolutely throwing himself forward, rapier in hand, the ruffians rushed upon him, and their blades met with a clash. Charles shouted to his myrmidons to take care of the lady, who, however, endeavoured to rush between the combatants, and although her effort embarrassed Mervyn, it also made the ruffians afraid to strike at him. The combat did nevertheless necessarily become closer, and perfect master as Mervyn was of his weapon, it could not long have remained doubtful against such odds, especially as Charles aided his allies by seizing Aurora, and endeavouring to force her away—when suddenly a shout was heard. "*Morbleu!* what sort of a charivari is this?" and a stranger rushed in half dressed, in doublet and hose hastily thrown on, his sword drawn, and struggling with a mob of women who endeavoured to hold him back.

"*Vie du roi!* what is this?" exclaimed the stranger, and the next moment he seemed to have explained matters to his own satisfaction, for he rushed forward, and

ranged himself on Mervyn's side, by dealing a blow at one of the ruffians which sent him reeling over chairs and flower-pots on the grass. Thus reinforced, Mervyn pressed on the other, and although he was a good swordsman, proved his own superiority by laying him at his feet severely wounded.

"*Peste!* but that was well pushed into the Flanders scum!" exclaimed the stranger, turning on Chiffinch, but he fled instantly, and so fast that it was hopeless to think of overtaking him. "And now, sir," he continued, "follow me if you do not know the windings of this paradise, for we shall soon have a whole nest of hornets about our ears. How the fiend have you raised such a riot in this virtuous establishment? A wench? Ay, always a woman or a priest in this world's trouble. But I could be sorry to see you here, Master Mervyn."

"Claude Duval!" exclaimed the young captain, in great astonishment.

"Even no worse a man," said Claude.

"This is a most virtuous lady, and of high rank, falsely beguiled to this den of infamy; help me to save her, Claude," said Mervyn, hurriedly, and soothing Aurora, who now hung faint and exhausted on his arm.

"Claude Duval, I am the king," said Charles, advancing, evidently absorbed in rage; "I am the king, and I promise you your pardon and a fair domain beside if you will help me to seize this traitor to his king and all faith!"

"You are the king! hilloa, Master Rowley, do you

recollect what we promised each other when last we met?" said Duval, "that if you caught me I should hang, and if I caught you, you should deliver;—so, sire, your purse or your life!" And cocking a pistol, he stood with it levelled at the king's head. Charles affected mute scorn, but it would not do, and finding that the stranger was in earnest, he sullenly resigned his purse.

"Take it back, you need it more than I do," said Claude with a bitter smile. "But you see I am a man of my word. Come now, Master Mervyn, this way, this way; chère mademoiselle, in the name of all sweet essences, whereof I have none, do not faint!"

"No, no, no, let us leave this horrible place," said Aurora; "I shall be quite well as soon as we are out of sight of yonder dreadful man!"

"You shan't take her—you shan't take her—she is a niece of mine, confided to my protection," yelled Creswold; "I'll send the peace-officers after you; villains, how dare ya abduct my child?"

"Peace, mother, let them go, since we may not at present help ourselves," said Charles, throwing himself into the chair with a loud laugh. "Farewell, master bastard! you shall understand anon what it is to have a king for an enemy!"

But long ere this denunciation concluded, the denounced, under the guidance of Duval, was almost out of hearing. They crossed the garden to the opposite palings, and Claude, lifting a mass of ivy, showed them a latched postern, which, opening, disclosed a little rural

bridge over the moat. They crossed this hurriedly, and found themselves in the artificial wild forming part of the Mulberry Gardens.

"Now you are safe, lady," said Duval, pausing, "I dare not accompany you farther. Keep ever to the left, Master Mervyn, and you will soon be at the Canal."

"Whoever and whatever you are, come with us—come to my father! Oh, he will thank you for I am bewildered," said Aurora.

"It may not be—not now at least, lady," said Duval, with a courteous smile. "I owed you a fair turn for the honour which you once deigned me of dancing a minuet on Hounslow Heath, for are you not beautiful Mistress Aurora Sydney? But there is no time to be lost; haste hence, Master Mervyn, and Heaven bless you both; you are your father's true son!"

"But, Claude, I have a thousand things to say to you; tell me at least where I can find you again?" exclaimed Mervyn.

"I will see you again shortly, dear Master Mervyn," replied Duval, "for I too have something to say—but now, farewell—we shall be observed."

"Ah, he is wounded!" exclaimed Aurora, for she now perceived the thick drops falling through Mervyn's sleeve, as he supported her round the waist.

"'Tis only a scratch, dearest lady!" said Mervyn, tenderly; but perceiving by his extreme paleness that he was exhausted, Duval advised him to sit down on the cool grass while he procured a sedan. He then ran

off and soon returned with a sedan, in which he saw them securely stowed, and told the porters to go to Sydney Place, and then set off himself in another direction, at a rate which showed he was not without apprehensions for his own safety.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ALCHEMIST.

MERVYN remarked, with some degree of alarm, that the route which his porters took must necessarily lead them past the front of Creswold's house; and he had hardly time to warn his fair companion before they found their sedan involved in a crowd assembled at the very spot. The bearers, after a short struggle with the pressure, sat down on their poles, so that although he kept himself very firmly ensconced hitherto, Mervyn looked out to see what was the matter. It was now getting dark, but there was a great blaze of torches round the door, and the first object that Mervyn discerned was Colonel Sydney, thundering at the knocker as if to beat the door down. Several gentlemen with their swords drawn, among whom Mervyn recognised Lords Russell and Howard, and some of Sydney's servants with staves, were around him.

Concluding instantly that he had traced his daughter's abductors by some means to this house, and that in all probability he would raise a riot which might make the adventure public, Mervyn whispered Aurora to remain where she was, and sprang out. Buffetting his way with some difficulty to the colonel, he arrested his arm at the very height of a third peal, which seemed to shake the building to its foundations. "Colonel Sydney, she is not there—she is in safety!" he exclaimed.

"Who are you,—who is in safety, sir?" said Sydney, turning round with the look of a madman. "If you are men, assist me to break this door down! I will abide all the consequences—Russell!—Howard!—good people! they have inveigled a lady to this horrible house under the most monstrous pretence. Assist me, if you are men and Englishmen!—I am Colonel Sydney—I will give any man a hundred guineas who bursts me open this foul portal!" And he dashed a massive stone at the oaken panels, which was followed by another from Russell.

"If you haf lost your monies there, you had better not lose your time too," said a Jewish voice from the mob, and there was a general laugh.

"Colonel Sydney, I assure you on my life, she is safe yonder!" exclaimed Mervyn.

"Safe! where?" said Sydney, wildly. "Who are you that assure me so?—What, Captain Mervyn!—villain, coward, where is my child? Restore her to me ere I wring that craven heart from thy breast!"

And he seized Mervyn by the throat with a force that nearly strangled him; then dashing him away, he raised his sword, probably expecting him to draw too—but overcome by pain, loss of blood, and this last galling insult, Mervyn fell against the gnarled root of a tree, and with such violence, that he lay insensible and bleeding. A piercing shriek from the sedan announced that some one there took an interest in this extraordinary scene; and recognising the voice, Sydney, rushed to it, followed by his friends. His daughter sprang out into his arms and fainted there.

"Take her home, colonel—she must not be made a ballad of!" exclaimed Lord Russell, and Sydney got into the sedan, with his daughter still insensible in his arms.

Meanwhile the mob lifted Mervyn, with their usual tenderness to one whom they supposed to be the vanquished hero of a combat, and amongst them all, the Jew who had formerly interfered seemed most active. He announced himself a friend of the insensible gentleman, and an apothecary in the neighbourhood, hired some men to carry him, and led the way to his own house, which was at the back of the Mall. It was a dark mean-looking dwelling, and the shop into which he admitted his prize, and the carriers of it, carefully excluding the mob retinue, faithfully resembled Shakspeare's lean apothecary's. It was ornamented with stuffed lizards, and an Egyptian mummy, which yielded a drug at that time in repute; two or three rows of phials and metal vessels, labelled in cabalistical characters,

forming the stock in trade. Beyond this apartment was another which, from the glow of light through many a crack and fissure in the wall, seemed a chemical laboratory; and this idea was not contradicted by the personal appearance of the owner, who was brown and shrivelled as his mummy, and had the hooked nose and glittering eyes peculiar to the race of Abraham, who at that time were considered the best professors of the chemical art.

The old man led the way into the inner room in which was a blazing furnace in full operation, and a dark alcove in which was a bed. On this they laid Mervyn, and the old man applied some vinegar to his nostrils, and then washed his luxuriant hair, which hung clotted on his brow. He opened his eyes at last, though without much speculation in them, and the Jew proceeded to examine the wound in his arm, which he probed and bound, observing that it was rather dangerous from the effusion of blood than any other cause. He then prepared some kind of drink, which he invited the patient to swallow, and although Mervyn had many indistinct associations of evil with the extraordinary Hebrew visage before him, he was too languid to form any precise notions on the subject. A deep sleep shortly after fell upon him, and the porters, satisfied with the remuneration which the Jew selected from the pockets of his patient, took their departure with earnest wishes for his honour's recovery.

How long he slept Mervyn could not guess, but he

was awakened by a murmuring of voices, which mingled for some time in his dreamy revery ere it roused his attention. But the recollection of where he was, and how he came there, returned in strange confusion on his mind; and it was not until he distinctly heard and remembered one of the voices, that he could form any clear idea even of his own existence. It was the voice of Lady Howard, and at the sound of it, the circumstances of his position came upon him with extraordinary vividness, and he looked with breathless caution through a little rent in the bed-curtains, into the laboratory. It was evidently night, for all was dark save what was illuminated by the flames of a furnace lapping round a brazier which rested on it ; but the glare fell full upon two persons, one sitting and watching the pan, the other—a female figure wrapped in a long mantle and hood—leaning against the pillar of the furnace. This conjunction of inauspicious stars, Mervyn instantly concluded, boded no good to him.

"Hush, Elkanah—he may awake and hear us!" said the lady, seeming to interrupt some observation of the Jew's. "I would not for the world he should awake."

"Nor I," replied Elkanah, "nor will he though an ordnance were fired at his ear, for hours yet, unless the loss of vital energy should have robbed my potion of its effect. I knew not how long it might take me to have your ladyship's commands, so I gave him a draught of which a few drops more would have put him to sleep for ever."

"Would you had—and I should have been spared the

hell of this moment!" said Lady Howard with a deep sigh.

"Imprimis, I knew not your pleasure; in secundis, I am so well known that I should be arrested for the murder though the body were found in Cheapside," replied Elkanah. "But what ish to be done?—Every thing in dish world for money."

"Why, he hath committed high treason—he hath struck the king's sacred majesty—he deserves death by law—and he must *die*," said the countess, with a deep and melancholy intonation on the last word. "But are you sure he is well asleep, Master Jew?"

"Surely, surely, he hath that would make a horse sleep from sunrise to sunset," said Elkanah, impatiently "Vell, ash you say, he struck de king—a crime abominable in our law as in your hereshy?—vel, can you not have his head chopped off for high treason?"

"No—I am held in a fearful bond not to appear in this matter—or all will be revealed!" replied Lady Howard, hurriedly. "The king dare not accuse him of a crime which covers himself with dishonour; but every crime should have its punishment, either by law or justice, Elkanah!—It may content the nature of his offence, which being secret, its chastisement should be so too—It may satisfy justice, Elkanah, to——"

"To cut his throat in his stupor?" said the Jew, eagerly.

"No, no, no!" replied the countess with a shudder. "I meant I will have him seized and sold as a slave in the plantations."

"Are your perquisitions then made, for I will not

warrant his slumbers much longer—and if he wakes, he is so fierce, he will resist like a mad lion!" replied the oriental.

"Within the hour they will be here—a slaver now lies in the river, and its captain is a creature of my making," replied the lady. "If you meet any one 'tis but to give out you are a press-gang. What say you?"

"I say 'tis a hazardous tempting of providence," said Elkanah. "These transports have a trick of returning and telling tales, as he that hanged the merchant of Bristol last year. Take the advice of one who hath seen life—yea, and death too—*dead men tell no tales.*"

There was a long and emphatic pause, the conclusion of which it may be readily believed Mervyn waited with some anxiety.

"Do you think he is so soundly asleep—could I look upon him for a moment?—They say he is very like Au—— like *him*, and it would steel my resolution," said the countess, rather to herself than her coadjutor.

"Would you kill him?" said Elkanah with a low chuckle. "Mark you, I will have no blood shed in my dwelling!—dish is our Hebrew Sabbath, and on dish day—no, not till the rising of to-morrow's sun—shall any man labour in his vocation under my roof, and therefore doth this pan sputter away for want of a little scumming which I will not give it."

"I would not kill him, Jew—unless mine eyes slay like the basilisk's," replied the lady, in a voice of deep

despondency. "But are you sure his wound is not dangerous?"

"If he abstain from wine and strong drinks for one fourteen days, he shall be whole as marble," said the apothecary in a regretful tone, and then he added in another of singularly horrible gaiety—"Yet, madam, it could be made as mortal as a dagger in the net of the heart, he, he, he!—you stare like a stuffed crocodile."

"But—but—without much pain to the unhappy youth?" said the countess, in a faltering tone.

"No gate of death opens without a little creaking on the hinges, lady," replied the mediciner, calmly. "'Tis but dressing the wound with a peculiar ointment, and on a sudden the blood is tainted into a thick and plague-struck mass—and the man dies."

"I do not bid thee do it, Elkanah—yet I would give a hundred golden crowns to any man who told me it was done!" said the countess.

"A hundred crowns!—what, to run such a ghastly risk—to purchase a drug every ounce of which is worth its weight in gold—delude the searchers with a tale of the spotted fever and with a bribe—bury him too!—all for a hundred crowns?—not for king nor kaiser!" exclaimed the Hebrew, vehemently. "No, lady, man may repent of every thing but blood, and unless the divine secret of the elixir vitæ, the wondrous faculty of withstanding all the blows of death, were mine—"

"Fool! do not prate to me of the elixir vitæ!" interrupted the countess, much agitated. "Let me see

this sleeper ere I resolve on any thing—yet hath he not challenged Howard? He must needs have discovered something. But, Elkanah, be certain thou art not deceiving me in this matter?"

"I swear to you, madam, my lord engaged me as his surgeon, and that was my business in the Mall when these things came to pass," replied the Hebrew, and taking a blazing coal from the fire in a pair of tongs, instead of a lamp, he lighted the countess towards the bed. Mervyn took his cue instantly, and feigned a deep sleep, but when he perceived the light of the flame as it passed over his eyes, he felt that the lids quivered, and it seemed that Elkanah observed it, for he withdrew the coal hastily. Then he knew that some one was bending over him intently, and of a sudden he felt a single scalding tear fall on his cheek, and a hand brushed his black ringlets from his brow.

"It is the very image of that unhappy man!" she groaned rather than said at last. "Oh, Elkanah, what a son were here, to a mother who dared love and acknowledge him!—Away—it kindles mine old hatred in my heart, to see how like he is! Well, prepare your ointment for his wound, since it must be."

"I shall need one to assist me in the preparation, for being the Sabbath I can handle none of these matters myself," said the Jew.

"We will trust no third—I will be your slave for the nonce—but, hark, what is that?" exclaimed the countess, as a low timid knock was heard at the door.

"Who is that, you mean?" said Elkanah, contemp-

tuously smiling. "It is a rich fool of mine, who feeds my necessities, in order that I may discover the great secret of transmuting metals *for him*—ha, ha!—and so I fool him to my purposes. Step into this closet, and I will soon dismiss him."

The countess seemed to comply, and the apothecary went into his shop, whence he returned with a lean ill-dressed man in a long russet cloak.

"Come in, come in, Master Bethel—you are as the fearful disciple coming in the night," said Elkanah, with a sardonic laugh. "I hope you have brought the fuel?"

"How goes the furnace?" replied the visiter, in a gruff tone.

"Oh, it cannot get on for want of the sublimed particles whereof I spoke to ye," replied Elkanah. "I might have projected perchance but for your delay; but now my mercury is all burned out, and as soon as daylight, I must to work preparing a new infusion."

"Thus are you ever with your legends and delays—Jew, you jew me!" said Bethel, bitterly. "But mark! here are the hundred guineas—they are the last you shall ever drain from me—and if I find you fail me again, I will force your neck into the halter whence I drew it."

"Look to your own, Master Bethel. These are slippery times," replied the Hebrew, snatching the purse very eagerly, which Bethel produced from under his cloak. "Think you that the *arcanum arcanorum*—the mightiest secret of nature—is to be obtained by

threats and imprecations, or by humble, patient, and laborious struggles with the powers that strive to conceal it? Come hither, unenlightened! behold what I have done! Look, how nigh to the celestial projection!"

And he exposed to the sheriff's dazzled eyes some particles of diamond dust glittering on a heap of lead, which he had probably prepared to deceive his dupe. Bethel surveyed the glittering bait with intense curiosity; but not satisfied with this display, the alchemist led him to his furnace, and opening the lid of the brazier, a fine blue flame shone glowingly round, and he began to explain his proceedings, in a jargon which, to Mervyn at least, was unintelligible.

His thoughts, however, were occupied on some other matter than divining the meaning of the adept's observations, if any there was; the absorbing topic in his imagination was, how to escape the horrible destiny in reserve for him. The sole chance which he could discern was to make off *vi et armis;* but as he had considerable apprehension that Bethel would side with his Jewish friend, and as he was armed with pistols, he thought it best to wait his departure. Meanwhile he glanced cautiously round the chamber for his own arms, and perceived his sword on the edge of the furnace, quite out of the reach even of hope. The inexplicable revelations to which he had listened had convinced him, however, of the extreme desperation of the circumstances in which he stood.

All Blood's hints had now acquired certainty in his mind; though it still seemed almost incredible, he could

no longer doubt but that he was the offspring of an illicit connexion between the colonel and the cruel woman before him, whose resolution to be rid of the evidence of her shame stopped not even at murder! As Lady Howard was an Aumerle too, his resemblance to that family was no longer surprising.

"Ah! it is your greediness, Bethel!" were the next words of the Jew, in which Mervyn understood a meaning. "*Ars longa, vita brevis est*—the elixir vitæ is a necessary preliminary of the mere search after the philosopher's stone! It is the shortness of the life of man alone which baffles his researches and the godlike penetration of his intellect, and *that* they designed above when they made us the poor fools and stalking shadows of time. What would it avail, master, to obtain the secret of transmuting gold to last but a few short years, and then to the great bar, to render a slavish account of what we have done. But the tree of life still bears its everlasting fruit, and cursed be the folly of the first of a foolish sex that plucked the apple of knowledge when that of immortality was within her reach! This evil must be remedied ere man can aspire to be in wisdom as a god; and if I live long enough, I doubt not, Master Bethel, I doubt not *we* shall both live for ever!"

At this moment a loud knocking was heard at the apothecary's door, which interrupted this brilliant exposition.

"What is that?—villain, do you design aught against me?" exclaimed Bethel, shaking as if in an ague, but laying his hand on a pistol in his belt.

"Not a hair of your head shall be hurt, master! Curse them, they come too soon, and will cheat me of half my harvest!" muttered the Jew. "Go in and hide, Master Bethel, and tell the woman within that she will be agreeably disappointed."

He pushed Bethel into the closet, and made a hasty exit as if to answer the repeated stroke at the door. Mervyn instantly, not without a vague hope that he might find an ally in the new-comer, sprang out of bed, possessed himself of his sword and roquelaure, and followed on tiptoe into the shop. But the first object he saw there effectually destroyed his hopes. It was Chiffinch, at the head of a file of musketeers, whispering earnestly with the Jew! Some of the soldiers perceived him instantly and levelled their carbines at him. Chiffinch turned, with a terrified exclamation, and ran behind the soldiers, shouting, "Seize him—seize him—this is the traitor!"

"Surrender, my master—resistance is of no avail," said Elkanah, suddenly clutching him by the belt; but Mervyn smote him instantly to the ground, with a blow which marked the restoration, however momentary, of all his physical powers.

"Surrender, villain, or I fire!" exclaimed the commander of the troop, raising a pair of pistols.

"On what charge, Sir Phillip Lloyd—if I mistake not?" said Mervyn, laying down his sword, and folding his arms quietly.

"On a charge of robbery—stealing the king's jewels," replied Sir Phillip. "But you will know more at

length in a few minutes—my lord mayor is sitting thus late for the purpose. Come, Master Chiffinch, bring the old man, and shut the house after us."

"Search it first—you will find two notorious ill characters in it, Sir Phillip," replied Mervyn, with a bitter smile.

"My warrant extends no further," replied the officer, and he escorted his prisoner to a coach which was waiting outside, into which they got without delay, and drove off at a rapid rate towards the city. And thus was Mervyn freed from one most imminent peril only to fall into another still more terrible. But he was somewhat comforted by the amazing nature of the accusation, which he felt it was utterly impossible to substantiate in the slightest degree against him.

It was, nevertheless, with many appalling recollections of his former appearance on the same arena, that he entered Guildhall, still escorted by his guide. Mervyn could not help thinking that the scene was to be of a similar nature, and the bitter consciousness of how little the justice of his cause had formerly availed him struck him like an assurance of evil. The royalist lord mayor was in the chair, and there were very few persons besides in the court; but Cornish, in his character of alderman, was on the bench.

Thus placed at the bar, Mervyn waited for some minutes, during which no one spoke, and then impatiently inquired the nature of the charge against him. As he did so, a door suddenly swung open, and an unexpected set of persons made their appearance. Colonel

Sydney, Lord Russell, Howard, and the Duke of Monmouth, entered *en masse*, made their way to the bar, and in a moment, considerably to Mervyn's surprise, he was overwhelmed with embraces and shakings of the hand from all four, but above all from Colonel Sydney.

"This is no time for apologies, gallant youth!" said Sydney, much moved. "But I do hereby humbly and publicly beg your pardon for the rash insult which in the madness of passion I offered you. I do acknowledge, sir, that I owe you more than my life—I owe you mine honour. We have sought you all last night and to-day, and as soon as we heard the false and villanous proclamation against you, with the more diligence, that you might overwhelm the tyrant and his minions with confusion. As it is, I offer bail to any amount, my lord mayor, and so will these gentlemen."

"We must hear the charge ere we know if it be of a bailable nature," replied the magistrate. "This is not the first time, we understand, that the prisoner has stood at a bar of justice—and here comes his majesty's solicitor and the witnesses."

As he spoke, Elkanah entered the court, his head bound in a bloody cloth, leaning partly on a staff and partly on the arm of a gentleman of the long robe. This personage immediately attracted Mervyn's attention. He was a tall, strong-boned figure, with a face that seemed as if made of cast iron, so sternly was every muscle and every line carved. His large nose, bushy

eyebrows, regularly arched, his bloated lips, and keen bloodhound-like eye, his narrow, high, and wrinkled forehead, informed Mervyn he beheld the most dreaded of the court ban-dogs, Sir George Jeffreys, afterwards the redoubtable lord chancellor.

Mervyn felt indeed an indistinct impression of alarm when he found that this worthy was to direct the proceedings against him; but supported by the host of powerful friends who seemed to have rallied round him, he renewed his demand to hear the charge against him.

"Ay, ay, you shall hear enough of that, my master, before we have done with you," said Jeffreys, bustling up. "My lord, this is the impudentest rogue living; he robs me his royal master, and beats us a poor old man because he would not aid and abet him, and comes here to ask what charge have we forsooth."

"Well, sir, what charge have you to make if you are the charge-maker?" said Mervyn, contemptuously. "And look that you keep on this side decency, or your long robe shall scarcely save you from a rough contact with the point of a gentleman's boot."

"Look ye, a gentleman! master jackanapes' bastard turned gentleman!" exclaimed Jeffreys, in his taunting manner. "Officers, keep a good look out, for he glares as fierce as a cat in dudgeon! Marry, these are precious times too, when the king's advocates are to be insulted by every offscum, and in such a worshipful presence."

"You shall not be insulted, Mr. Sergeant; I am here

to do justice—no man shall say a word against the king's advocates!" said the lord mayor, bristling fiercely up. "But state your charge, sir—what is the king's charge—his majesty shall have justice done him here at all events."

"It may chance that I shall meet you some day where justice is less impartially administered, so have a care, Sir George!" said Mervyn.

"I trust it shall not be till the day of judgment then, for I hope to see many rogues swing for a less offence than yours," retorted Jeffreys. "And now, my lord, to explain the horridest felony that ever was, and which deserves the rope for three as good reasons as ever went with a man to Tyburn; and I confess I am ashamed to see gentlemen of such quality taking up such a cause. The prisoner here being a poor beggarly upstart, for some reason of his majesty's generosity, and his horse running away with him towards the enemy, which begat him some reputation for courage—I say, this gentleman thief of ours is made captain of his majesty's gentlemen-at-arms, to the prejudice of many worthy men, and he would have been knighted had not his mother forgot to give him a name. But set a beggar on horseback—your lordship knows the proverb. No sooner is he with his foot in the stirrup, in full career of fortune, than lo, and behold, the thief's blood in him gets the better of his patent gentility; and divers articles of jewellery and plate at various times disappear. But of course no one suspects my gentleman, though his reputed father was no less a person than that famous

jewel-stealer, Colonel Blood. Moreover, he keeps up a secret correspondence with his majesty's enemies—I mean, the Shaftesbury gang, my lord, which methinks are much more bitter than all the French in the world—and takes to spreading scandalous lies about the king and the duke, in the factious way, among coffee-houses and brandy-stews. His majesty, thereof credibly informed, thinks proper to dismiss him, and away bolts my lord, ere the news was known to Master Chiffinch here, and begs from him the key of the royal jewels, under pretence of orders from the king—and that same night divers gems of priceless value are missing. Here were case enough methinks to hang any rogue in a Christian country——"

"It is an infamous conspiracy!" interrupted Mervyn, mad with rage.

"Hush, sir, we cannot permit you to interrupt Mr. Sergeant," said the lord mayor. "You shall be heard in your turn, provided you say nothing disrespectful of his majesty."

"'Slife, my lord, we have proof enough," said Jeffreys, triumphantly. "Master Chiffinch, describe what jewels you do clearly know to have been stolen from his majesty's casket, for methinks you have their custody."

"My lord, I—I can only say," said Chiffinch, who trembled very much—"I can only say—that I missed at various times various things, but on the night of Master Mervyn's departure, the famous Portugal sword set with rubies, which his majesty had with the queen, and a diamond aigrette for the hat."

"The Portugal sword!" exclaimed Sydney.

"Monstrous calumniator!" shouted Mervyn. "When and where was I dismissed? Rogue, I dismissed myself when I saved a noble lady from your master's brutal violence."

"See you, my lord, the marvellous impudence of this fellow!" yelled Jeffreys. "He hath trumped up a lie as big as Atlas, against the king's majesty, to excuse himself, but you shall see!"

"Nay, it is true, I swear," said Sydney, vehemently; "it is true, my lord; the insulted lady is my daughter, and this gallant young gentleman did most truly save her, at the peril of his own life."

"I have nothing to do with the follies of heedless young women, endeavouring to entrap their kings," said Jeffreys, laughing sardonically. "My lord, hear our proofs; and then decide on the credence due to these factious gentlemen; they will swear for one another like regular affidavit men. They are of the Spaniard's opinion, that if a lie will hold good but for half an hour, 'tis worth telling. My lord, we shall prove that this good young innocent traitor did actually offer the stolen jewels for sale to this poor old gentleman here—an honest apothecary somewhere in Barbican—but who occasionally deals in precious stones, like most of his persecuted tribe. Master Elkanah, tell my lord how you became possessed of this bijouterie." And he held up a jewelled sword and aigrette. Sydney took and examined them with nice attention.

"My lord, please you, my lord," began the Jew, turn-

ing of a leaden colour with hatred and fear, "I am a poor Israelite, something esteemed for my skill in herbs, and I may say, too, something for my judgment of such glittering baubles as these. I was in my shop yesterday, when Master Mervyn was brought in, badly hurt by a gentleman whose daughter he had seduced, and I bound his wounds and tended him even as mine own child, so that, whether for gratitude or to ruin me, I know not, but he produced these jewels and offered to sell me them for sixty gold marks. Knowing them instantly to be of his majesty's jewellery, I grew appalled, and begged him to restore them privately, or else I would inform of him; whereupon we had some words, and he beat me, and might perchance have murdered me, but of the sudden comes up Master Chiffinch and the officers to arrest him, and——"

"It is enough, quite enough to hang fifty such monstrous rogues!" exclaimed the magistrate. "Away with him to Newgate! make out his committal! a pestilent rogue and murderer!"

"My lord, this man is totally unworthy of credit," said Lord Russell, eagerly. "Before you send this honourable young man to a dungeon on his evidence, I demand to ask a question or two of him. Tell me, Jew, were you never at a bar on a trial for your life?"

"Never!" said Elkanah solemnly, clasping his withered hands.

"On your oath, old man?" continued Russell, and the Jew looked at him with keen rat-like suspicion, but shook his head negatively.

"Then, my lord, he is perjured," said the Lord Russell, "I was myself foreman of the grand jury when a true bill was returned against him for poisoning an ancient woman at the instigation of her heir—and he but escaped the rope by a flaw in the indictment, which all men thought was contrived."

"Ay, indeed, say you so, my Lord Russell?" said the mayor, looking in a puzzled manner at Jeffreys; and the old Hebrew turned to a deadly yellow whiteness.

"These base panders have but contrived this plot to gratify the king's hatred!" exclaimed Sydney.

"You are wofully deceived, my dear sir," said Jeffreys, smoothly. "My lord, I am sorry to say this much, but it is in my instructions—the truth is, this unhappy rogue had seduced a lady who shall be nameless—had inveigled her into a house of questionable reputation up by the Mall, and being detected by the father, he invents the horridest lie that ever was against the king, because forsooth his majesty being of a gay turn, as we all know, God bless him, chanced to be in the same street at the same moment."

"Atrocious villain, you lie! and the king your master too if he says so!" exclaimed Sydney. "But since you put me on it, the whole world shall know your black treason. My lord, these gentlemen are evidence."

"I do not bear his majesty's commission to hear him abused," interrupted the lord mayor. "And let me tell you, Colonel Sydney, you do your daughter no good, if she be the lady, to bandy her name thus in men's mouths."

"But, brother, we are bound to hear him, if he would

be examined as a witness—we have all heard rumours enough about the king and Mistress Sydney, and commended the colonel's prudence in withdrawing her from court," said Cornish, eagerly interposing. "Come, Mr. Sydney, you shall be heard."

"But first let me inquire when these jewels were said to have been stolen?" said Sydney, with extraordinary emotion. "When were they missed?"

"Last night," said Chiffinch, eagerly.

"Last night! you are positive?"

"I am on my oath, and I am most positive," said Chiffinch, with some degree of anxiety.

"Then this witness too is perjured, my lord," said Sydney, triumphantly. "I swear that I saw this sword at the king's jeweller's, in the Haymarket, this morning, and Master Chiffinch came in and fetched it away while I was there in the back shop, settling some money matters for my Lord Howard."

"This is amazing! have you any witnesses, colonel?" said Cornish.

"The Duke of Monmouth and my Lord Russell were there at the same time," replied Sydney.

"And particularly noted the sword," said Howard, "for I remember my Lord Russell telling me of it, and saying that Tangier and a trumpery sword were poor pay for receiving popery into the very heart of our councils."

"This is strange—very strange, Mr. Sergeant!" said the lord mayor, looking still more bewildered.

"Give us but time, my lord, and we will produce more witnesses, to knock down this tale of a cock and a

bull," said Jeffreys, somewhat lowered in tone and manner.

"No, my lord, with such clear proof of the prisoner's innocence—whoever may be guilty—it is in law and justice to discharge him instantly," said Lord Russell.

"Ha, my Lord Russell, do you come here to teach us the law?" said Jeffreys, insolently. "Marry, this is no factious house of commons, no mob-meeting on Wapping-Moor; your word is not law here."

"Nor no man's, as I hope, in any part of England!" said Sydney, vehemently. "And now, my lord, to explain the matter whereof I spoke."

"Sir, I have his majesty's instruction publicly to acknowledge the perfect honour and spotless reputation of Mistress Sydney so far as *he* is concerned," interrupted Jeffreys.

"I will hear nothing irrelevant to the case," said the lord mayor, in a vexed tone. "I am nevertheless willing to take bail in two sureties of a thousand guineas each."

"I see very well how it is—the king shall have no justice, not even from a loyal subject!" said Sir George, snatching up the jewels in a passion. "And I will go and tell him so!"

And he walked hurriedly out of the court, followed by Chiffinch and the old man. Bail was immediately tendered by Sydney and Lord Russell, accepted, and arm in arm with the two latter, Mervyn left that hall for Sydney Place.

CHAPTER IX.

LOVE, PHILOSOPHY, AND PLOTS.

Mervyn was now regularly installed in Colonel Sydney's house as a guest, and as his wound confined him within, he was almost continually in the society of the colonel and his lovely daughter. Nothing could equal the tenderness, the assiduity, the enchanting vivacity of this beautiful nurse, and painful as his wound frequently was, Mervyn ever after looked back on this period of his life as a sort of revery in paradise, a delicious dream of perfect happiness! And who that has ever loved, and recollects the springtide of passion, when the myriad hopes and fears and joys and griefs which love blossoms forth in such wild profusion, are in full bud and glow and fragrance in his soul—but must deem him then indeed most happy?

It was not that he had dared again to breathe his

passion, and had wrung an absolute assurance of its return; a tacit but exquisitely sweet understanding did nevertheless exist between the lovers, and a pledge of faith and mutual confidence was exchanged without the aid of words. By some strange logic of passion, Mervyn persuaded himself that he thus avoided any violation of the large and unbounded trust which Sydney put in him; while the colonel was so absorbed in profound speculations, and in the whirl of stormy politics into which his party had plunged, that the subtle smiles, the casual blush, the half-checked sigh, the mute language of the eye in which love pours his tenderest tale, passed unnoticed before his pre-engaged senses. Moreover, all republican as he was, the vast difference of rank between a nameless orphan and a daughter of his almost royal race, seemed to make so vital a difference between them, as to render a mutual passion as improbable as that of a frog for a star.

Meantime, Mervyn was not without his little jealousies, even in this height of happiness, and of credulous faith in the future. Monmouth haunted Mistress Sydney, as constant as her shadow; Howard was a perpetual visiter, and under the guise of friendship, Mervyn perceived that he nourished a strong passion for the beautiful Aurora. Meanwhile it was obvious that her chief care and delight were in pleasing Mervyn; on him she lavished all the charms of her vivacity, her roseate smiles, her many and brilliant talents; she sung, she played, she rattled away with a perpetual gaiety and good humour,

which seemed to have an inexhaustible source in her young and ardent soul.

Sydney's house was at that time the rendezvous of almost all the chief personages of the popular party, except Shaftesbury, who, though he continued an active correspondence with all, was at the time under a sort of concealment, few knew precisely where. Mervyn was of course introduced to the party, as a new but zealous partisan, from whose great talents and wrongs much might be expected, and an unreserved confidence took place between himself and Sydney. His revelations on the popish plot evidently much surprised the latter; but as he already distrusted the intriguing character and measureless ambition of Shaftesbury, and had always held aloof from his more intricate combinations, it only increased the feeling of aversion with which his upright and unbending nature regarded such Machiavelian manœuvres.

Sydney was at that time engaged in completing his fatal treatise on Government, and he took delight in expounding his grand reveries to his young convert, and in removing one by one the deeply ingrained prejudices of his monastic education. The serene wisdom, the godlike benevolence, the grandeur, often visionary as it might be, of his speculations, his manly and poetic eloquence, infused his theories irresistibly into a mind so vehement and prepared for the sparks as Mervyn's.

In truth, those grand visions of the perfectibility of man, his natural equality, the nobility of his destinies,

which in practice are perhaps only sublime impossibilities, became life-like existing realities on the eloquent tongue of the sage. Sydney had drunk at the same fountains whence the antique mind of Milton had drained inspiration, and although in his writings he used a perfect and even bare simplicity, confiding in the native strength of his reasonings alone, there were times when he poured forth torrents of eloquence, which wanted not scanning to become the most magnificent poetry.

Aurora's admiration of her father was enthusiastic, and she took his principles without examination, as truths of Holy Writ. But, though she troubled herself but little with reasons for the faith that was in her, still her eloquent echoings, her flashing eye, the beautiful colour which glowed on her cheek when she listened to his fiery invectives, produced more effect on Mervyn than any syllogism which Aristotle could have clamped with his iron logic.

Sydney's system was a noble Saxon version of that which in all ages has been the sublime revery of the greatest and most philosophic minds—which Plato mused—and the most illustrious perhaps of men, certainly of kings, the great Alfred, attempted to put in practice. With a mind naturally susceptible of all that is grand, generous, and vast—in short, poetic—Sydney had still a perfect appreciation of the actual state of things, and it is the attempt to conciliate his noble theory with the workings of a practical experience in men's passions and motives, which constitutes the great value of his treatise. He has accordingly left behind him a work, the logic of

which, like the stones of a pyramid, is wedged together beyond the power of men to sever. His great knowledge of history and men, his personal experience of the effects of almost every system of government, furnished him with an inexhaustible mine of comparison and argument. Sydney shrunk from none of the consequences of his system, and Mervyn, with the secret hopes and aspirings lurking in his breast, embraced with enthusiasm doctrines which flattered them as it were with delicious music.

But time—inexorable time—wore on, and as Mervyn's convalescence no longer afforded him a pretext, he began to feel that his longer delay in Sydney's house was growing strange, and even improper. Still he could not prevail on himself to break the exquisite fascination which hung over him, and every night he formed a resolution which he broke every morning. Besides—what was he to do? The world was all before him, but he had apparently little to choose. Sydney took a warm interest in his behalf, and a variety of plans were continually passing in review in their conversations, which produced no result. Sometimes Mervyn talked of going on the continent, and offering his sword to one of the warring powers—the French, the Dutch, the Germans, the Turks even; but a tearful glance from Aurora, or a smile of saucy incredulity on her sweet lips, quite overset these warlike determinations. Moreover Sydney would not hear of his leaving England, and hinted mysteriously that the time was coming when the strength of his conversion to the cause

of freedom would be put to the test. In fact the arbitrary policy of the court was no longer disguised, and the resolution of the popular party to resist it to the utmost was every day assuming a more determined and menacing aspect. Nothing more was, however, done in the matter of the pretended robbery, but Mervyn guessed rightly that it was only reserved for a favourable time.

In the midst of these cogitations and vague plans, something hopeful seemed to present itself. Lord Howard, whose displeasure at Mervyn's favouritism he had with difficulty kept concealed, brought a message from Shaftesbury, earnestly desiring to see him. As Sydney made no objection, and Howard intimated that it was to make a proposal which would prove of advantage to his fortunes, Mervyn assented; for he was now almost moneyless, and his proud spirit revolted from accepting the bounty even of the generous Sydney. Accordingly he accompanied Howard in a boat to Wapping, where the earl resided in obscure lodgings, known only to a few of his most attached followers. The reason of this seclusion was his dread of a new arrest, which, now that the court had succeeded in making two of its creatures sheriffs, was not likely to end in an ignoramus jury.

Landing at the stairs, they passed through several low and intricate alleys, and at last arrived before a row of small tenements, each flanked with a little neglected garden, and apparently occupied by persons of a very indigent class. A broad ditch of fetid water ran be-

side the road, over which was a row of almshouses, apparently built for the express purpose of enjoying its odours, for the windows ranged all along it. Several sluttish women lounged about, gossiping over the railings, while the men sat smoking at their doors, seemingly unconscious of all that was going on.

Among these dwellings was a little chandler's shop, decorated with a bunch of consumptive candles, a maggoty cheese, a flitch and a half of bacon, and an empty hogshead, once of sugar, but now swarming with wasps. Towards this establishment did Howard direct his steps, and entering the shop, which was scarcely wide enough to admit his companion too, inquired of a round, fat, bristle-bearded man, who was anxiously weighing a slice of butter for a ragged little girl at the counter, if Mr. Ashly were at home. He was answered in the affirmative by a woman who was at hand, and who opened a door, standing aside to allow the visiters narrow room to pass, and descending two broken stairs they entered a room paved with red flag, about eight feet square, furnished with a bare oak table and three chairs, where sat the elegant and princely earl, propped up by pillows on a miserable couch, one of his feet wrapped in a blanket, the other wearing an embroidered slipper. He was reading, or trying to read, a book he held in his hand, but at the moment they entered, his face was screwed up with pain, and tears actually forced themselves from his eyes. Here was a lesson in ambition! The great conspirator forced to abandon his splendid home, and to hide himself without attendants

in a hole at Wapping, waiting in pain and anxiety the decision of perplexities which he had all his life been busied in producing.

"Thank God, you have Christian faces at all events!" exclaimed Shaftesbury, as the woman retired. "Captain Mervyn, give me your hand—I trust now you have learned what faith to put in princes?"

"When I put any, my lord, I shall deserve the betrayal which is certain," replied Mervyn, cordially returning the earl's hearty embrace.

"Your wrongs pledge you sufficiently, if you have any human blood in your veins," said Shaftesbury, with a smile. "Tyrants themselves make the best and most desperate revolutionists. And now, captain, let me ask your pardon for that foolish letter of which Monmouth reminded me to-day; but I did not know you then, and circumstances justified my regarding you as a friend and perhaps *employé* of the Yorkists; for it is the misfortune of men like me, who have seen too much of mankind, to believe in little that is true and much that is false; because falsehood, like a berouged coquette, counterfeits truth better than she herself appears."

Mervyn assured the earl with perfect good faith that he had almost forgotten the circumstance alluded to, and recognised the force of his motives in acting as he did.

"You are a generous fellow, Mervyn, and I read mark and likelihood in your face that first time I saw you with the hell-serpent, Oates," returned Shaftesbury. "But let us talk in French, or these chandlery friends

of ours will have a tale for the council's ear. I lack such men as you—men of young hot blood, that will not stand for ever on the brink. My designs have been frustrated by the unhandsome disappointment of Monmouth and Lord Russell, who have withdrawn themselves from their engagements. I had all ready in London, and they were pledged to the same in the country, when behold they recede! and they tell me they are not in a condition to concur with me at this time. But, God's life! I look upon it as an artificial excuse, and an instance of their intention wholly to desert me. But nathless, my gallant boy, there is such a preparation made in London, that if they be willing to lose the honour of being concurrent with me, I am able to do it myself, and intend speedily; for there are ten thousand brave boys ready to follow me wherever I hold up my finger! But we must begin at the beginning; you must pledge yourself to our cause,—for I mean to confide every thing to you, as indeed I have the consent of my fellows—Sydney into the bargain. I intend you shall be my intermedio with the city—my master of the works. You shall reside in Aldersgate, in my palace, have as much money as you choose, and direct all my manœuvres till we burst out some fine morning, and at night you shall pay your respects to the Lord Protector as general of our cavalry—I think you will make a dashing fellow at some such place as Edghill now!"

"But at present, my lord, I am at Sydney Place, and—" began Mervyn, when the earl interrupted him—

"That is another reason in my favour," he said, with

a keen and penetrating glance. "Do you know that the world already begins to marvel at your stay there, and after what was insinuated before that deplorable blockhead, the lord mayor, it concerns the reputation of Mistress Sydney that you should not be seen too much together. All the world, Master Mervyn, is not engaged in writing a treatise on tyranny—or government—is it?—and people half think there may be some stronger motive than gratitude in your recent exploit of chivalry. Ah, see now, how he blushes, like a maiden caught kissing by her mother!—Well, sir, I desire not to probe what you may desire to conceal; but I would remind you that the days of romance are over, and that it is only in a new and bustling world that merit without birth or wealth to back it can hope to elevate itself to the level of its aspirations."

"I accept the office, my lord, if Colonel Sydney approves," said Mervyn, hastily.

"Colonel Sydney is not so deep in the matter as to be desperate," replied Shaftesbury, "therefore he disapproves of my plan; in fact, it is from ignorance that they all hang aloof; but I, who have spun the great web of my policy of all their separate passions, interests, and follies, know that it is so mingled with a coarser yarn, that either the whole stuff will be spoiled, or it will turn out a tapestry for Whitehall! But now you too belong to the desperate genus, Master Mervyn! Do you think old Rowley has forgiven you?—Oh, no! you have not heard the last of your Portugal sword; and now that there are two Tory sheriffs in, the reign of the

ignoramus juries is over. Tell me—do you accept the appointment?—if so, here are my keys, and my major-domo will receive you as his master."

Thus pressed, Mervyn consented, though not without some momentary reluctance.

"And now I will expound to you this excellent plot, into which you must coax these panic-stricken men, or at least on which I must have a definite answer," continued Shaftesbury. "But we are all rather out of spirits, Howard—put your hand up the chimney—'tis my cellar now—and you will find a bottle of rare Valdepeñas."

Howard rose very willingly, drew a table, mustered some crystals, and produced a bottle from the receptacle indicated by the earl, where he had put a case to cool, for he pretended that it boiled on the fiery floor. Thus freshened by his favourite beverage, Shaftesbury launched out in all his usual eloquence, and with a brilliancy of illustration, and a clearness of exposition, which showed that he at least was not bewildered by the immense variety of irons which he had in the fire.

Mervyn soon found with amazement that he stood unconsciously on the verge of a revolution, and that all the ground which had seemed so firm, was instinct with the volcanic fluid, ready to explode! The influence of Shaftesbury's vehement eloquence was, however, too powerful on an imagination so warm and romantic as Mervyn's; it swept away all that remained of his calmer judgment, and he rose from the interview a desperate partisan, ready to do and dare all.

It was now agreed that a meeting of all the chief persons of the party should be summoned, and that Mervyn should obtain an explicit answer to the proposal of Shaftesbury, that a general insurrection should immediately take place. Meanwhile he was to try and gain Sydney's concurrence in the scheme, which would entail that of his small but illustrious band of supporters; and all failing, Shaftesbury, Howard, and his immediate partisans were, according to him, strong enough to do without them.

CHAPTER X.

THE RYE-HOUSE PLOT.

Mervyn returned to Sydney Place in a state of excitement, which could not fail to be remarked, and the colonel and his daughter besieged him with inquiries. To the latter he readily accounted by mentioning Shaftesbury's proposal, and his acceptance; but he saw that Sydney had some inquietude of his own on his mind. He assented, however, with a readiness which secretly hurt Mervyn, to his announcement that he meant to take up his residence immediately in Aldersgate; but it was some comfort that Aurora's eyes filled with tears, and the roses deserted her lovely cheek. The colonel too seemed to remark this, for he inquired somewhat sharply what ailed her; and then abruptly asked Mervyn to take a turn with him in the garden, for that he had a communication to make.

When they were at some distance from the house, the kindness of Sydney's habitual manner seemed to return, and taking the young man's arm,

"I am glad of this matter between you and Shaftesbury, though you must take care you fall not into his mad schemes," he said, "and on an account, which while it makes me smile, somewhat troubles me. Read this epistle," and the colonel handed a paper to Mervyn, addressed to Colonel Sydney, and putting him on his guard respecting a reported attachment between his daughter and Captain Blood.

"It is Chiffinch's handwriting—atrocious villain!" ejaculated Mervyn, colouring very deeply.

"But this absurd report has gained ground elsewhere, my Lord Russell tells me," continued Sydney, "and it behoves me to put an end to it: perhaps I am something late to do so, but my contempt for men's opinions leads me wrong the right way. And yet I feel I am as completely their slave as any other man, by the way in which this foolish rumour affects me."

"You then consider such an alliance as one involving disgrace and dishonour, Colonel Sydney?" said Mervyn, impetuously.

"An alliance!—it cannot be that you ever really entertained such an idea!" said Sydney, sternly.

"I see now what the systems of philosophers are—words, mere words!" said Mervyn, bitterly. "What is there marvellous even if I dared to love your daughter, Colonel Sydney? Am I not a man? Have I not eyes to see beauty, ears to imbibe harmony, a

heart to love, and an arm to protect? And is she not a woman, young, beautiful, and every way worthy of the most passionate and pure affection?"

"And have you told her all this fine stuff, Master Mervyn?" replied the colonel, calmly.

"When I brought Mistress Sydney the king's proposals, she knew that I was either the basest slave alive or a half-maddened lover!" said Mervyn, with vehemence.

"This clears up the only cloud that rested on you in my opinion," replied Sydney, evidently struck, "and it reminds me well that but for your courage my daughter would not now be worth an honest man's acceptance. Oh, Mervyn, would to God we had destroyed this abominable mass of prejudices and cruel follies, on which the present structure of society is raised! But how can I wed my daughter to poverty and shame, even if she returned your love?—let but the time come when the great principles for which I have all my life contended are no longer treated as idle dreams—come to me on some well-stricken field of liberty, which establishes the righteous doctrine of the natural equality of men—and I will prefer you as my son to the greatest despot on the face of the earth!"

"That field may be struck in a few days," said Mervyn, much mollified by this speech. "Lord Shaftesbury bids me tell you—"

"I will hear no more of Shaftesbury's ravings; nothing is ripe but his own mad rage," interrupted Sydney. "But there comes my daughter; I trust so much

in your honour, Mervyn, that I leave you to make your adieus privately; but thenceforth your visits to my house must be to me alone."

And the colonel dived away into another walk, but not without Mervyn perceiving that he was much moved by the conversation which had just passed.

Aurora now approached, and though she affected to gather flowers by the way, she looked very melancholy, and it was evident she had been weeping. Mervyn offered his arm, and together they returned towards the house, in a very unusual silence.

"So you *will* leave us?" she said, at last, with an attempt at a smile, which ended in her eyes filling with tears.

"I *must* leave you, dearest Mistress Sydney!" replied Mervyn, passionately. "Your father, dear Aurora, has extorted from me the secret of my love, and I am pledged to see you no more until I have done something to elevate myself from the degradation in which I am plunged—but trust me, loveliest, that shall soon be, or I will lie lower yet!"

"And did my father treat you with—did he dare to remind you of this?" said Aurora, flushing vividly. "I tell you then, Mervyn, though I love him better than all the world, myself included, yet in this matter neither he nor all the world shall hinder me from following the dictates of my heart. Here is my hand—if you accept it, I will be yours and yours alone for ever! —and though I will never marry you without my father's consent, I will never marry another."

And here, as our hero and heroine have assumed the character of avowed lovers, we shall close the conference between them, and proceed with our narrative, in the belief that the conversation of persons so situated has no interest for any body but themselves.

In a few days Mervyn was regularly installed in Thanet House, and at work with all the eagerness and daring of youth, in his new capacity of conspirator-general. In the exercise of this office he acquired an intimate knowledge of all the levers which the master hand of Shaftesbury had organized, and he became aware that he had formed plot within plot, of the most discordant and incongruous materials. Besides the open and constitutional parties of Sydney and Russell, he had formed a dark and violent conspiracy in a lower and more desperate grade of society. Mervyn found it impossible to make these two coalesce;—the latter were ready and prepared for any measures, however violent; the former utterly refused to take a decided part until they had exhausted all the means of constitutional resistance.

Matters were in this state, when news suddenly reached Mervyn that Lord Shaftesbury had fled to Holland! Whether induced by the weakness of disease, or the immediate apprehensions of arrest, remained unknown, even to Mervyn, who merely received a commission from the earl, appointing him to the management of all his concerns in England, and a general assurance that he meant to return in a few weeks. And thus devolved upon Mervyn the uncontrolled manage-

ment of one of the most difficult and dangerous webs of policy ever spun by the subtle genius of man.

Mervyn had now a station and a political importance which the extraordinary events of his life, his reputation for courage, and the known personal hatred of the king, increased, so as to put him almost on a level with the chiefs of the party. A borough devoted to Shaftesbury was pledged to elect him, if a parliament was again summoned.

Mervyn's visits to Sydney Place, though he economised the happiness as much as possible, were neither few nor far between; and Sydney seemed to have forgotten his regulation, for Aurora never failed to make one of the party. It is true that she was almost always surrounded by a buzzing crowd of admirers; but there was a slight yet exquisite distinction—a tenderness invisible to all but a lover's eyes—in her manner to Mervyn, which made him feel as secure as if she had none, and enabled him even to enjoy the homage and universal admiration which she excited.

Meanwhile, an open insurrection had been tacitly resolved on by the conspirators, and a tangible means and opportunity were all that remained in discussion, when one morning Howard (who, by-the-by, had taken a great liking to our hero since he had been in a condition to lend money) rushed into Mervyn's apartments, with the information that he had formed a plan which would supersede every other; but he declared that, to judge of its feasibility, he must accompany him to a place in the country, whither he would not tell.

Mervyn readily consented; they mounted their horses, without attendants, and rode under Howard's direction till they reached the north road, ere Mervyn inquired whither they were going. But Howard laughingly refused all satisfaction on this point, and they continued their road, apparently towards St. Albans. But before they reached that town, Howard suddenly turned eastward across the country, and they emerged on the Cambridge road. The badness of this by-road considerably fatigued the horses, but Howard continued to put them to their mettle until they arrived in sight of the Lea, as it flows through its sweet pastoral landscape. Here he somewhat slackened his speed, and pointing to a house, whose chimneys rose above a fine group of trees, announced that it was their destination, and that an old friend awaited him there.

Mervyn perceived, on a nearer inspection, that they were approaching a square battlemented building, fortified with two towers, one square, the other round and peaked. It had an arched entrance and a fortified gate, and had apparently been, in former times, the castellated dwelling of some warlike gentleman; but it was, at present, degraded into a farm-house, as appeared by the numerous outhouses which extended on both sides of the road, which was sheltered by a thick wood of birch and oak.

As they drew near, the agricultural purposes to which the mansion was applied, became more apparent. Oxen and cows stood in a shady pool near the house; peacocks strutted about, and the various sounds of a busy

farm-yard blended with the perpetual whirr of a mill which they now observed among the oaks, turned by a roaring current. The tower seemed used as a barn; there was a loaded wain piled up with corn, at one of the windows, and a strong athletic man, in his shirt-sleeves, who seemed to be the master, stood on the top, forking the sheaves down.

Into this yard the travellers rode, and almost up to the cart, without being observed, when Howard whistled a peculiar air known only to the initiated. The man on the cart shouted some cant words in reply, and sliding himself dexterously down the corn, presented to Mervyn's gaze the slashed features of his quondam acquaintance, Rumbold. The meeting was cordial almost to roughness, and Rumbold, assisting them to dismount, led them proudly into the establishment, which he named the "Rye House," and announced himself to be the master of it.

The most hospitable attentions were now heaped on the guests. Their horses were transferred to the stables, and themselves to neat apartments, where they were left to refresh. Meanwhile, the preparations for dinner were hastened and improved, and Rumbold greeted them on their descent, in a handsome dress cut in the newest style. They were then ushered into a large oaken parlour, substantially furnished, where Mrs. Rumbold appeared in a full blaze of finery. Howard found time to whisper to Mervyn, that she had been the widow of a rich maltster, and had made over herself and her property to the disfigured old roundhead soldier. The

conversation at dinner was principally made up of dissertations on farming and malting, and Mervyn inwardly marvelled in what this farce was to end; but as the fair hostess was too much delighted with her company to retire immediately after dinner, he was kept for some time longer in suspense. At last Howard proposed that they should go out and see the improvements in the farm, and the hint being readily taken by Rumbold, they all sallied forth.

Immediately they were out of earshot of the house, Mervyn led the conversation towards the subject of his thoughts, by inquiring—"Have you heard, my lord, when old Rowley goes to the Newmarket?—Is it next week as usual?"

"So 'tis confidently said," replied Howard; "but Captain Mervyn is not yet in the heart of our mystery," added he, turning to Rumbold, "and I must explain a little—but 'tis not possible to have things in readiness to make the attempt as they *go*. Look you, Mervyn," he continued, "we have the notablest plot afoot that ever was, for lopping the two sparks. But let us first view the localities. Here you see is the Newmarket road."

And he stepped out of the yard on to the road by which they had arrived.

"Ay, the directest road to the Newmarket, whereby the king and the duke always go to the races," said Rumbold, eagerly taking up the word. "You see, sir, it passes through the heart of my farm-yard, and is flanked by my outhouses and that scattered wood——"

"Not so loud, Master Rumbold," interrupted Howard,

in his turn. "But now let me explain, for I planned the whole matter and should understand it best. Now, Mervyn boy, were it not as easy as snaring partridges, to ambush some forty resolute men in the wood and outhouses, hedges and ditches, and what not? Then it were a cheap accident to overturn a cart in the road, and so stop the king's coach—he is seldom guarded by above thirty horsemen—one well-aimed discharge would empty half their saddles—then out upon them and empty the rest. Charley must either be death's prisoner or ours; meanwhile our friends in London and the country must be aware of some project afoot, and be ready to explode insurrections in all parts. It will be easy for us to escape through fields and by-lanes till such time as we can join our masses, and be hailed as saviours of the nation. Fore gad, an excellent plot! What ails you, captain?" added he, on observing the effect of his communication on Mervyn; "do you show the white feather after all?"

"Assassinate the king! murder him?" repeated Mervyn, in a horror-struck tone. "Never, never! I cannot consent to it. It were sufficient to overwhelm our cause with horror. The republic itself would demand our heads."

"Is this the thick-and-thin gentleman you told me of, Howard?" said Rumbold, obviously much disconcerted.

"He who says I will not go as far in my cause as any man, lies!" exclaimed Mervyn. "But assassinate—dip my hands in the king's blood—I will not. Sydney

would be the first to execrate such a deed. Seize him if you will—bring him like his father to trial, for his treason to the people—bring him to the block!—I am ready and willing to lay down my life in such an attempt; but I will assassinate no man, though he were Nero himself."

"Now he hath set his nose against the wind, he will run till he burst," said Howard, coarsely. "Would not the king have assassinated *you*, but for Sydney's good memory?"

"Yet perchance he hath reason," said Rumbold, musingly. "This age is too squeamish for such noble acts of Roman virtue to be prosperous; and if *his* head too rolled on the block, I know not whether it were not of more terrible ensample, having such majesty of deliberate justice."

"'Tis ill salving a mortifying wound; cut to the quick at once!" exclaimed Howard. "But supposing that we attempted merely the seizure of the royal persons—we must do that with a sharp conflict, and how can we march a little army here unobserved if we are not to attempt a surprise?"

"But we will attempt a surprise!" said Mervyn. "Only let our *object* be, if possible, to spare the tyrant for a higher disposal. If he falls resisting, his blood be on his own head!"

"And if you capture him where will you take him and yourselves?" said Howard, sneeringly.

"I will rouse London simultaneously; I have the means," returned Mervyn. "This house and such forces

as we can hastily muster would be strong enough to resist, in the first consternation, until we hear good news from our friends; at worst the king's safety will guarantee ours."

Rumbold and Howard seemed apparently convinced by this reasoning, and it was finally resolved that the attempt should be made in the manner recommended by Mervyn. Emissaries were to be despatched to prepare a general revolt, and the citizens were to hold themselves in readiness. They even concerted a plan of the barricade which was to stop the royal carriages, the means necessary to turn the Rye House into a little fortress, and the places where the horsemen might meet without raising suspicions. Howard engaged to procure the men for this desperate enterprise, and Rumbold was to have all in readiness at the scene of action.

Mervyn's task was of a different but not less hazardous complexion. He was to set all the wheels of the conspiracy in motion in the various parts to which its machinery extended, and then to cross the seas and bring back Shaftesbury to head the outbreak. The great influence of the earl, and his perfect knowledge of the men and means to be employed, made it impossible to attempt any thing without him, and the plot was too dangerous a secret to be entrusted to a letter or a common messenger. Finally it was agreed that the moderates, as they called the Russell and Sydney fractions of the party, should know nothing of the matter in hand until Shaftesbury arrived to conciliate them with his influence.

To prevent suspicion it was resolved that Mervyn should embark at some distant seaport; and after some difficulties and delays in the needful arrangements, he was actually setting his foot on the deck of the vessel which was to bear him from Hull to Amsterdam, on his mission to Shaftesbury, when news reached him of the sudden death of that nobleman!

This information had arrived at Thanet House before Mervyn could return thither, and on his again presenting himself he found that he had already ceased to be its master. Every thing was under lock and seal, the servants dispersed and strangers in possession, and finding it useless to urge any claims of his own, he took his departure, resolving to find out Howard, and ascertain how matters had gone in his absence. They met at a coffee-house in the vicinity of Howard's residence, and the earl brought with him Colonel Rumsey, Shaftesbury's most trusted and intriguing instrument.

"So, poor Shaftesbury is gone! cut off in full blossom?" was Howard's first observation, after wringing Mervyn's hand with seeming cordiality.

"The court hath some inkling of our plot; have you not heard?" said Rumsey, hurriedly, "there is a warrant out against you, Captain Mervyn, as a seditious ill-disposed person. Heaven knows who will be the next."

"We will take our prisoners first without a warrant, Master Rumsey," said Mervyn, calmly. "In three days the king or I shall be in the Tower; and I trust in my good star."

"Nay, then you do not know that the king is re-

turned safe and sound to London?" replied Howard. "The malignancy of fate would have it so, that a fire broke out in Newmarket, and burned part of the royal lodgings, so Rowley and the Duke left it a week earlier than we expected."

"So now there is nothing for us but to stir," said Rumsey. "Our heads are in the lion's jaw, and he begins to wag his tail. Our friends, the moderates, are met to dispute on what is *not* to be done now Shaftesbury is gone, and we are going to try and coax them into something valorous. Come with us, Master Mervyn, and lend us your eloquence."

Mervyn readily assented, and the three took their way to the house of Mr. Hampden, where the moderates held their meeting, although he himself was something of a deeper dye. In a handsome apartment, furnished in the pompous style of the Louis Quatorze era, Mervyn found the chiefs of the party assembled—Monmouth, Essex, Russell, Sydney, and the young master of the house, who all received him with great cordiality. They were all in deep mourning, but the table was covered with a rich dessert, and glittering wines of every growth and colour, the better to blind the eyes of the court to their proceedings.

"You come in the very nick of time—we have just appointed a cabal to manage the party, and you shall be one of us, captain," said the Duke of Monmouth. "Shaftesbury was but one man, but it takes all of us to replace him,—like twenty-seven shillings for a moidore;

and you, who know the clue to all his plots, will be half himself among us."

"No, my lord, I aspire to no such honour," replied Mervyn; "I am but an instrument; use me as such, and if I fail your hand I shall break not bend."

"There are six of us, yet odd numbers *are* lucky," said Essex, with a forced smile.

"At all events, it is no longer time to deliberate when Catiline is at the door!" said Rumsey. "We must either fight or fly. Know you not, gentlemen, that there is an order for Master Mervyn's arrest? What will be next, think you?"

"There is but one question—shall we die like sheep, or make an effort for our own lives and the liberty of the nation?" exclaimed Howard. "Colonel Sydney, do you still believe the times are not yet ripe, or do they need our blood to make them bear fruit?"

"My sword is loose in the scabbard," replied Sydney.

"Then, gentlemen, let us determine at once!" exclaimed Mervyn. "Revolt—and revolt at once, ere men's minds have time to chill into submission. Let our only questions be the where, the when, and the how."

"I am for the country—the west country!—it was predicted to me I should fight a great battle there," said Monmouth. "What can one do in the city? It would be impossible to stand a charge of the king's horse unless the train-bands declare for us, and they are but

overfed squeamish citizens, who prefer their fat ease to every thing."

"Let us barricade the city, as the people of Paris did in the days of the Fronde," said Sydney. "I will undertake to hold London against ten thousand men for three weeks, if we can only make good the first three hours."

"Give me two hundred men, and I will surprise you the guards, and the Tower—I know they keep no soldiery precaution," said Mervyn.

"No, let us begin at a distance if we would prosper," said Monmouth, vehemently. "It hath been prophecied to me that my star—I mean the star of the republic—shall rise in the west, like a royal sun! Taunton for me!—the king will have to take his choice of these two horns—either to send down his forces and leave the city unprotected, or give us time to form in the country if he does not."

"But leaving this question to future digestion, another of more importance claims our attention," said Lord Russell. "Where are our magazines and sinews of war?—what preparations have we made to furnish our friends with arms?—or indeed how can we procure them without arousing the watch dogs of the government?"

"Ay, where is the gold, the dollars?—we cannot stir without gold!" exclaimed Howard. "For my own part, I am an exhausted mine, an Escorial, as the Spaniard hath it—but I can pledge my wife's jewels."

"In good faith, we shall need some twenty or thirty

thousand pounds to begin on," said Monmouth. "I will subscribe all I can drain from my Jews—but that will be little enough. Moor Park is pawned."

"My Lord Grey sends word that he will subscribe ten thousand guineas from his private purse," said Rumsey, with a laugh, in which the whole company joined heartily.

"But ere we advance farther, it were well, nay, necessary," said Sydney, "to consider how to make a coalition of councils with Scotland; and for that purpose let us select some fit person to be sent thither, to unite us into one sense and care."

"Argyle and the clan Campbell are ready at the whistle of a pibroch," said Monmouth. "And there is my Lord Melvin or Sir John Cockram willing enough to speak to the principal men of our interest in those parts."

"Nay, for they cannot put their nightcaps on but a Lauderdale spy reports it," said Lord Essex. "It must be some new face in Scotland—what say you to Master Mervyn?—It will need great management, too, for Lauderdale hangs before he tries."

"If I am hanged, my lord, it shall be in London," replied Mervyn. "I tell you again, I am a soldier not a politician."

"And Mervyn's great knowledge in Shaftesbury's plans are essential to our own," said Howard.

"Well, sirs, I know another who may match the devil for cunning—Master Aaron Smith," said Sydney.

"I will engage to bring my Lord Melvin in—he is

something of my wife's kindred," said Monmouth "And if my Lord Russell will write to Sir John, to whom he is personally known—"

"Aaron will manage it admirably—a subtle dog—I know him well," interrupted Lord Howard. "But for what purpose are these gentlemen to be brought to London?"

"To form a plan of operations with us,' said Monmouth. "Argyle hath but to unsheath his claymore, as Captain Mervyn knows, and the highlands are all a blaze. But the man will need money, and who hath any at his dispose?"

"Give the Scots but gold, and they will rebel every day of the year, against any thing or any body," said Rumsey. "But I am of Captain Mervyn's opinion, and would have the flame burst out in every part of the kingdom at once."

"Let us hear Master Mervyn's list of those towns on which poor Shaftesbury principally depended, and would have had us throw the sparks in," said Lord Russell, in his usual calm and deliberative manner.

"London—Bristol—Taunton—York—Chester—Exeter!"—poured out Mervyn.

"A goodly catalogue," said Sydney.

"And now we have united ourselves in this dangerous undertaking," said Hampden, "it may be well to ask a question which has already been put to me—To what end is all this? It is meet that we direct our proceedings by such principles as shall not put in jeopardy the properties and liberties of the people. For

mine own part I would resolve all into the authority of a parliament."

"And that chosen fairly, not by a few chartered rich men, but by the whole mass of the people!" said Sydney, eagerly.

"I trust we are all agreed that it is only the public good we intend," said Monmouth, with a dark frown. "But for my part I know that though the Scotch may be brought to it in time, the noblemen there will not at present suffer a commonwealth."

"We have conquered them under kings; why not under the republic?" said Sydney, sharply.

"Let us not quarrel about the skin till we have caught the bear," said Lord Russell. "But meanwhile we have sat so long in deliberation that it is time to part, if we would not make a tale for the cabal's ear to-morrow. Let us resolve nothing until our messenger returns from Scotland, and agree not to meet again till then, lest we rouse suspicion."

"You will be too late then!" said Mervyn, passionately. "You are putting off the day of danger as you think, but it will only bring it faster on."

"The fox that had lost his tail would fain persuade his brethren to cut off theirs," said Monmouth, with a bitter smile.

"Come to my house; you will be safe there awhile," said Sydney, warmly extending his hand to the young conspirator.

"Rather to mine, Sydney," said Lord Russell, significantly.

"To neither, my lord," said Howard, hastily. "I will lend him a horse, and he shall to our friend, Rumbold's, in the country, till this wind blow over. I have prepared all for his reception."

Mervyn readily accepted this alternative; it was agreed that he should wait at the Rye House for the messenger's return from Scotland; and the meeting broke up in a state of uncertainty on all the points on which it had been convened.

It was a fine frosty moonlight when Mervyn found himself on the Cambridge road, well-mounted and alone, on his way to Rumbold's fatal farm. The bright freshness of the country air somewhat cooled his fevered blood, and a mood of deep melancholy followed, in which he allowed his horse to fall into a tranquil walk. Unwilling to alarm the family at the Rye by a night arrival, he allowed the animal to continue its sauntering pace till daylight broke, when he thought that Rumbold, who was a man of very active habits, would shortly be astir. He was right in his conjectures, for, on turning into the Rye road, the first person he met was Rumbold himself, coming at a rapid gallop, well-armed, and in such haste that he was upon Mervyn almost before he could turn out of the way.

"Why, Master Rumbold? this is strange riding!" he exclaimed, as the colonel suddenly drew a pistol from his girdle in a distracted manner, but as suddenly recognising him, let it sink in great amazement.

"What, Captain Mervyn! whither so early?" he said.

"To your house—for shelter," replied Mervyn.

"You seek then more than the owner himself can find!" replied Rumbold. "I have certain intelligence that the folks at Whitehall have found out every thing, and I have but three hours' start to get out of the clutches of a sergeant-at-arms!"

"Whence have you this intelligence?"

"From that damnable paltry villain, West, and little Keeling, the vintner; they were going to tell the council every thing, because they are named in the proclamation with you!"

"Save yourself then; I will return and put Howard on the wing!" said Mervyn. "I can do it in a couple of hours, and if no better can be done we will off to the Hague together."

"You can't do it on that blown horse—take mine—I have a good start," said the generous maltster. "And here is a swig of brandy—it will do you good, for you look as pale as a turnip."

Mervyn at first declined this noble offer, but considering how much depended on his speed, he at length consented, and embracing very heartily, the two conspirators parted—never to meet again on earth.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ADDLING OF A CONSPIRACY.

MERVYN proceeded rapidly on his way back to London, till he reached a hill near Barnet, in descending which his horse stumbled and came to the ground, breaking both its knees; and finding it impossible to proceed, he led the animal to Barnet, stowed it at a farrier's, and endeavoured to procure another. But as he was quite unknown in the town, and had but little money with him, no one would trust him with so valuable an article, and distracted with the delay, he resolved to resume his journey on foot. He arrived in London about noonday, almost too faint to stand, covered with dust, and disfigured from head to foot, so that he could scarcely be recognised even by those who best knew him. The first thing he heard on reaching Holborn was a proclamation offering a reward of one

hundred pounds each for nine of the inferior actors in the Rye House plot, and of a thousand for Monmouth, Lord Grey, or himself. On inquiry of a bystander he learned that Lord Russell had been before the privy council, and was sent to the Tower; but this was positively denied by one who had seen his lordship return to his own house under a guard.

Howard, however, was not named; and, in the distracted state of his mind, Mervyn could resolve on no plan but to seek him out, and ascertain the real state of things. He dared not trust any one with a message, and he therefore determined to go to Aumerle House, in half an hour he stood on the steps of that mansion. He had never been in it since his arrest by Oates; for, singularly enough, Howard never invited him to his house, nor of course had he ever desired to enter it himself. All seemed quiet, and it was not fear but an inexplicable chaos of feelings, which shook his hand as he lifted the massive knocker. The door flew open with strange rapidity, and with a start he saw that it was opened by a soldier. His presence of mind did not, however, desert him, and he inquired for the Lord Howard.

"Come in, all's fish that comes to the net," replied the soldier; and observing Mervyn hesitate—"Come in, master dusty!" he added, levelling his arquebuse. "You must have my captain's permission ere I suffer you to depart."

Finding that no better could be done, Mervyn pretended a ready acquiescence, and the soldier escorted

him up stairs. Every thing was in confusion, the servants standing about, and the house in a state of general disorder. He was conducted by his guide, or rather captor, into the grand drawing-room where his first interview with Lady Howard had taken place, when introduced by Blood. But things were much changed; a number of soldiers were engaged in ransacking and searching about, with their swords drawn, piercing the tapestry, and seemingly in active pursuit of some concealed object. An old stern-looking officer directed their proceedings with the motion of his pistols, and a clerk stood near him, engaged in making an inventory of the articles around. Lady Howard herself sat in an arm-chair, pale as death, her brows deeply furrowed, her hands clasped—a statue of resolute desperation.

"You see, sir, it is impossible!" she was saying as they entered. "He is not here; he has gone to Holland—'tis a week since. He is safe at Amsterdam, I hope!"

"It cannot be, madam," replied the commander. "His lordship was seen yesterday in the Mall; I will stay here till doomsday but I will clutch him. His bed was warm—here are his doublet, shoes, sword—my men surround the house—he cannot have escaped. It were well methinks if he saved me further trouble, for I am certain he is here, and I will take the house down brick by brick ere he shall 'scape me!"

"You will find that difficult, Sir Philip—my ancestors built it strongly," said the countess, scornfully. "But

continue your search; be sure and do not neglect to examine the swallows' nests on the eaves there."

At this moment Mervyn's captor stepped up and whispered to Sir Philip, who turned sharply round. "What sort of fellow is't?" he said. "By'r lady, a tall likely lad!—who the fiend are you, man?"

"My lord's bailiff at Eskricke, for the receipts, sir," said Mervyn, in a counterfeited tone of stupidity.

The first sound of his voice made Lady Howard start, and she looked or rather glared at him for a moment like a famished she-wolf.

"Do you know this man, madam?" said the captain, startled at the wild expression of her eyes.

"Know him!" she said, or rather shrieked, and springing up, she extended her hand in vehement denunciation. "Yes, Sir Philip!—seize him, he is a traitor! Seize him!—I will prove him a traitor!—it is the bastard—it is a Rye House plotter—Mervyn, as he calls himself!"

"If I am a traitor, madam, then so is your husband!" said Mervyn, calmly.

"Thou liest, miserable villain!—he is no traitor!" she shrieked. "Perish the very name of Aumerle ere one hair of his head be hurt!"

"Surrender yourself, sir—you are in the proclamation; but this violence, lady, is strange and unchristian," said Sir Philip.

"My name is Mervyn, and I surrender myself," replied the young man, with desperate composure.

"Give me your sword, sir—I am sorry for you,"

said the captain, and Mervyn was sullenly preparing to unbuckle it, when a shriek from Lady Howard announced that something terrible had occurred. All turned—and a soldier was observed dragging a man's leg down the chimney, followed by the rest of the body, all begrimed with soot, and in shirt and drawers. Black as he was, and trembling all over as if in an ague, Mervyn easily recognised Lord Howard. There was an immediate rush of all present round him, and seizing the moment with the desperate energy of his character, Mervyn sprang to an open window, and leaped out of it, with scarce a glance to ascertain whither he was going. He found himself instantly in a bed of carnations, on a terrace of the garden, and within a few yards of the river—the next moment and he was plunged in its waters. Aware, however, that he should be closely pursued, he swam desperately to a coal-barge, which proved to have no one on board, and creeping into the hold among the coals, with his sword in his hand, he awaited his fate.

Hours elapsed without any molestation, although he was occasionally alarmed by the voices of passing bargemen. Night came on before he ventured to peep out of his concealment, and the stars shone in the dark waters like a bespangled veil, and the huge sombre masses of the great city seemed to slumber to its calm rippling. Apprehensions that those belonging to the barge might return and discover him, now took possession of his mind, and he determined at all risks to make the land. He therefore hailed a small sculler

which was shooting rapidly past, to Whitehall, and inquired if he could be taken thither. The waterman replied that he had another fare for the same place, and that he might come and welcome, and Mervyn leaped on board.

He immediately looked out for his fellow-fare, but did not perceive it till the waterman, with a laugh, pointed to a figure reclined at full length on the prow. It was habited in the usual garb of a doctor of the church, but the peruke and skullcap had fallen off, and revealed to Mervyn's startled eye the features of Dr. Oates, in a state of beastly intoxication. He was snoring audibly, and sucking in air like a stranded whale.

"Brute!" muttered Mervyn, shuddering with intense disgust, and he sat for some minutes looking at his bloated countenance, which was rendered frightful by the convulsive twists which passed over it. An evil conscience, not to be lulled either by liquor or sleep, seemed at work within, and Mervyn could not help feeling a vindictive pleasure in the sight. But suddenly the boat touched Whitehall stairs, with a stroke which roused the drunkard, who started up in apparent consternation. After a glare around him, he gave a sullen yawn, threw the waterman a penny, and staggered out of the boat. A thought suddenly occurred to Mervyn, and flinging the waterman his fare, he leaped out after him.

Oates staggered drunkenly along from the stairs, and proceeded a little distance up the lonely road which

skirted the royal gardens. An attentive survey satisfied Mervyn that no one was within sight likely to interrupt his proceedings; he then walked rapidly after Oates, who, hearing the sound, turned sharply. The moment his eye fell upon Mervyn, he uttered a shrill scream, and falling on his knees, clamoured loudly for mercy.

"Do you mistake me for your master, the devil, wretch?" said Mervyn, slightly touching him with his sheathed sword.

"Oh, sir, take my money, my watch, any thing but my life!" yelled the terrified villain.

"I want none of them," said Mervyn, fiercely; "but strip off those disgraced canonicals and that peruke, or there are not three minutes between you and damnation!"

Oates obeyed, sobbing like a beaten schoolboy, and as he stripped off his holy garb, Mervyn transferred it rapidly to his own person. Even the peruke, though with great disgust, he put on, and telling Oates that if he stirred within an hour from the spot he would infallibly pistol him, he gave him a parting kick, and went on. Some few minutes brought him to St. Martin's church, which was then striking ten, and he paused to consider his ulterior proceedings. The only chance of escape which suggested itself, in his desperate and moneyless circumstances, was to take refuge at the residence of Colonel Sydney, if still that sanctuary were respected. He therefore struck into the fields between St. James's and St. Giles's, and arrived at Sydney Place within an hour.

With a heavy and foreboding heart he rang the huge bell of the garden which he had so often heard tinkle the rarest music, as it seemed to his lover ear, and the door was opened by the faithful old steward, Ducas, with a tremulous caution which struck a chill of terror to his very soul. The moon shone brightly, but Ducas did not seem to recognise him, and answered his hurried request to see the colonel by an abrupt assurance that he was gone to town, and had not returned.

"His daughter, then—is Mistress Sydney at home?"

"What may your reverence want with her?" replied the old man, suspiciously eyeing the wild and begrimed priest before him.

"I am from Taunton, the great Mr. Trenchard's chaplain," replied Mervyn. "Give my lady this small sign; she will not refuse me admittance."

And he handed a ring to Ducas, who no longer refused him the privilege of *entrée*. He followed the old man into the flower-garden before the house, and throwing himself exhausted into a chair formed of the twisted boughs of a living elm, awaited the result of his application, in a state of indescribable agitation. But a few moments elapsed, and a light fawnlike step was heard. Mervyn sprang up, and the next instant his beautiful and beloved mistress was clasped to his breast, in a mingled agony of joy and grief, which vented itself in a strange paradox of smiles and tears.

"You are safe, Mervyn; they can find nothing against my father, and I am happy now!" said Aurora, at last releasing herself gently from his embrace. "But

what brings you from Rumbold's? we thought you were in security there."

Mervyn briefly narrated all that had passed, and her terror seemed to increase with every word of his relation, although he stood before her safe from the fangs of his enemies.

"Oh, it is all the malignity of that cruel king!" she sobbed; "why should that barbarous woman betray you? What have you done that you should be arrested any more than my father?"

"Russell is arrested; I was Shaftesbury's lieutenant!" replied Mervyn, hurriedly.

"But you are almost dead with fatigue; come in, come in; you are sufficiently disguised in this garb until my father returns, when we can devise means for your escape," said Aurora, with visible trepidation. "You shall to your old apartment, and I will give out—"

"You will not exile me from your society, Aurora! the last moments I may ever spend in it?" said Mervyn, with a sadness which again melted her to a gush of tears.

"No, no, but there is some one there—one whom I cannot leave," she replied, with hesitation.

"Some sparkling beau of the court, whose sunshine of fortune makes the darkness of mine too sombre to your taste, Aurora!" he replied, with vehemence.

"No, Mervyn, no, a fugitive in hiding like yourself; a man who is your friend;—in short, the Duke of Monmouth."

"The Duke of Monmouth!" repeated Mervyn, with a start.

"Yes," said Aurora, without seeming to notice Mervyn's surprise and tone. "Come and join us; if even the duke recognises you, he is your friend; but I think what might puzzle my penetration will baffle his. Come, dear Mervyn, it shall be so."

Mervyn was almost ashamed of his momentary suspicion, but he complied, and followed Mistress Sydney to the library. The table was spread with a supper of fruit and confections, and wines glittering among snow in Sydney's Italian vases; every thing looked as if some distinguished guest were present. And there, reclining voluptuously in an arm-chair, splendidly dressed and profusely perfumed, and languidly thrumming a Moresco guitar, sat the ducal conspirator. As it was a very hot night the windows were open, and showed a wide expanse of starry blue, hanging like a canopy over the distant yellow glare of the vast city; and it seemed as if he were reclining, in amorous languor, to catch the sweet fresh air which blew over the fields of new-mown hay surrounding Sydney's little paradise. He raised his eyes, and his eyebrows too, when Mervyn entered, and seemed to look upon him with any feeling but that of welcome. Aurora introduced her lover under a name which he selected himself, as Master Tobias Venner, chaplain to Trenchard of Taunton, who was one of the conspirators, and of great consequence in the west. Monmouth himself passed for one Captain Stuart.

"Well, your reverence, and what are the news out of the west?" said Monmouth, after a fixed stare at the stranger, without recognising him. "Or rather I should say out of the coalhole, whence you seem to have recently emerged?"

"You are correct in your supposition, sir," replied Mervyn, in a feigned voice. "And, perhaps, there are worse places than a coalhole these troublous times."

"Since I have been so successful in my first hypothesis, allow me to hazard a second," continued the duke, with a goodnatured smile. "I cannot help thinking I have seen you before, Master Toby, when your face was not so black, and your beauty was of a cleaner though not more striking description?"

"Right again, sir," replied Mervyn.

"Nay, Mistress Sydney, you must resume your former seat, or I shall owe Master Toby a spite for life," said Monmouth, eagerly, observing that Aurora had drawn a chair near the stranger, leaving her own unoccupied. Ducas now entered, and spread another cloth for Mervyn, with viands of a more substantial nature than those before him. Mervyn was too much exhausted to eat, but he swallowed a goblet of wine which Aurora handed him, with eagerness, and it seemed to infuse a new life into his veins.

"Well, Master Toby, you have not answered my questions about the good people of the west?" said Monmouth. "Are they all running hurry-scurry in every direction? and how do they like the new lord

chief-justice Jeffreys, who, they say, is to pay them a visit this autumn?"

"The consternation is boundless, or it would not have reached an humble servant of the church like myself," replied Mervyn. "But all men unite in saying that had it not been for the timorous delays of the Duke of Monmouth and his friends, the Whitehall people would now have been as glad of a coalhole as the best of us may live to be yet."

"Say nothing against the Duke of Monmouth, friend—he is the best fellow in England, myself not excepted," said the duke, gaily. "But are there any news about Captain Mervyn, who ran away like that sagacious animal the rat, long before any one else saw the house was falling?"

"Captain Mervyn is safe, I am happy to say—fled to Holland," said Aurora, with affected carelessness.

"Well, we will drink his good health, and a happy voyage to him!—he will marry some Dutch squaw, and turn tulip-grower," said Monmouth, filling his goblet, although he had evidently indulged freely already. Monmouth's wild blood seemed now afire with the two passions which held strongest sway in his mercurial temperament.

"I'll wager my head still that I lose or circle it with a crown!" said he, after some general conversation. "And then—I know where to look for a queen whose beauty shall add a lustre to the diamonds of her royal wreath."

"Your lady-wife?—she is indeed held fair," said Aurora, blushing with much displeasure at the eager gaze which the duke fixed upon her.

"Oh, I will have my Woodstock and my fair Rosamond," said Monmouth. "Or I will play bluff king Hal, and make the loveliest woman in England (for the time being) the highest—and can you doubt who that is, Mistress Sydney?"

"The wine plays you false, Captain Stuart!" said Aurora, snatching her hand away, which Monmouth attempted to take.

"Nay, lady, it but opens the door to imprisoned truths!" replied Monmouth. "I dote on you—I say it before this reverend man—I hold my life as a thing of no price but such as your beauty gives it! Marry, were it not better to be a king's belamour than the most lawful wife of a Dutch herring-skipper?"

"Of a Dutch herring-skipper?—you keep me amazed, my lord!" said Aurora.

"Why, men report you have a sneaking kindness for Master Mervyn, and must he not turn to that if he would keep his body and soul acquainted in Holland?" replied Monmouth.

"But is there no better occupation there for a gallant young soldier than catching herrings?" said Aurora, with an irrepressible smile, but she looked vexed too.

"Gallant young soldier!" repeated Monmouth, scornfully. "Base intriguing spy you mean, Mistress Sydney! I have no doubt that it was he who betrayed

us all, and will perhaps bring your father to the block! He is but a tool and subtle instrument of the papists!—it was he who balked that noble plan in Scotland—and have you forgotten his share in Godfrey's murder?"

"In Godfrey's murder!" echoed Aurora, her whole face illumining with indignation. "In Godfrey's murder!—I would this were not my father's roof, that I might tell you what I think of this most false and unmanly accusation!"

"Were he here I would tell him the same to his face!" returned the duke, impetuously.

"And were he here, he would tell you to your face, that you lie—that you lie basely and blackly!" shouted Mervyn, in his natural tones.

"The lie!—ha, think you your cloth shall protect such insolence?" exclaimed Monmouth, with flashing eyes; and clutching what he fondly deemed was the hair of his antagonist, intending to deal him a blow, he merely pulled off his peruke, and his thick black locks fell in clusters on his shoulders.

"Mervyn!" exclaimed the duke, with a start.

"You know me now, son of Mrs. Lucy Waters!" said Mervyn. "And I know you better than ever I thought to do, and henceforth I hate you worse than the detestable tyrant whom you please to call your father."

"I am a king's bastard at least!—you are a false thief and murtherer's!" exclaimed Monmouth, grasping his sword-hilt.

"Let us try then which is worthier of his parent-

age!" said Mervyn, drawing his sword in frantic rage—but Aurora rushed between them, and rang a bell on the table, to summon assistance. The door opened almost immediately, but it was to admit Sydney himself.

"My lord, news, news!" he exclaimed, entering in such agitation that he did not at first notice that of his guests. "What in heaven's name is this?—swords—Mervyn!—My lord, what is this?"

"I chanced to pay Mistress Sydney some slight gallantry, and he takes upon him to be jealous—this new arrival of ours!" said the duke, confusedly. "Forsooth, this beggar of Colonel Blood's strain is jealous of a granddaughter of the great Northumberland! You will have a precious son-in-law, an you use not your eyes, Sydney!"

"This is no time for these matters," said Sydney, hastily. "The duchess is informed that your retreat is discovered, and York's halberdiers are on their way to search my house. The king hath sent word that her apartments are secure—a hint that you may take refuge there. A coach waits to convey you, and there is no time to be lost; for Howard is seized, and, as they say, hath confessed some strange conspiracy in Hertfordshire, and implicates us all."

"I will depart then instantly," said Monmouth, turning very pale; then rallying, he added, "My uncle would give more for my head than for a German boar's, epicure as he is! Farewell, dear lady! and Heaven keep you from harm!"

"Hark! it is the tramp of horse—away, sir!" exclaimed Sydney. "Mervyn, resume your disguise—there is no other safety for you."

The duke snatched Aurora's hand to his lips, and wringing Sydney's, rushed out after Ducas, who led the way. Sydney then turned to Mervyn, and gravely inquired how he come there, and what had happened between him and the duke. He was in the midst of a very brief narrative when the door opened, and Ducas entered with an appearance of great consternation, which needed no explanation, for Sir Philip Lloyd followed close on his heels, with his sword drawn, and some axmen after him. All rose, and Aurora clung to her father's arm, who, with a look, admonished her to silence.

"Let me not disturb you, colonel," said Sir Philip, sheathing his sword when he observed the lady, and motioning the guard to remain at the door. "Mistress Sydney, your poor servant! I wish to spare you all unnecessary pain, but I must do my duty." And producing a paper, he added, "Here is a warrant from his majesty in council to seize you, Mr. Algernon Sydney, and your papers."

"On what charge, Sir Philip?" said Sydney, with perfect composure.

"High treason."

"The court-name for patriotism," said Sydney.—"Reverend Master Venner, look to my daughter—cheer up, Aury!—remember you are a Sydney—at worst 'tis but a temporary imprisonment."

"My father—oh, my dear father! nothing shall separate us—I will go with you though it be to death!" shrieked Aurora, and throwing herself into her father's arms, she fainted.

"Remove her—take her away—I can bear any thing but this," said Sydney, with strong and visible emotion. "Alice!—Master Venner, take her away!"

The old nurse rushed in at this moment, and giving his daughter into her arms, Sydney went to Sir Philip, who was engaged in inspecting a heap of papers on a table. "It is nothing but my Treatise against Sir Robert Filmer," he said, with indifference.

"I must seize it, nevertheless," replied Sir Philip. He then swept the table of its strewments, and packed them with other papers which he found in a desk, into a trunk, which he sealed.

Hitherto Sir Philip had taken little or no notice of the scene which was going on in another part of the room, nor of Mervyn, though he took no pains to conceal himself. By this time Aurora had revived, but in vain did Sydney endeavour to reassure her; she clung about his neck and wept incessantly.

"Master Venner," said Sydney, turning to Mervyn, "promise me, if I return not by noon (though I doubt not to be bailed), to take my daughter to Penshurst, to her uncle's protection. We are not on good terms, but he cannot refuse his niece shelter in such a time as this —nor you hospitality, good wanderer of the highways of truth."

Aurora seemed then for the first time to recollect her

lover's danger, and she sat down white and trembling and irresolute, while her father gently kissed her brow, and with a smile of heroic composure wrung the hand of Master Venner, and then left the room, followed by the guards and their packages, leaving his daughter once more insensible.

CHAPTER XII.

CLAUDE DUVAL.

THE greater portion of the dreadful day which dawned after these events, was spent at Sydney Place in a state of indescribable anguish. Aurora had indeed by far the best hopes and conclusions, for her notions as to the extent and nature of the plot were of course limited; but Mervyn, who kept locked in his own breast a clue to the terrible rumours which were afloat concerning the discovery of a new plot, suffered a complete hell of fears and anticipations. He knew that Sydney had had no part in the Rye House conspiracy, it is true; but his own experience of royal justice gave him but little hope on that score, considering the personal hatred which the king bore against Sydney.

A few hours, however, brought better news. Ducas returned with tidings that, although the council had

committed Sydney to the Tower, nothing of any consequence was deposed against him, and he expected to be liberated in a few days; but meanwhile he desired Aurora to proceed instantly to Penshurst, under the protection of Master Venner. The propriety of this measure was undoubted, and moreover, the secure refuge which it seemed to offer to Mervyn, was an irresistible motive, for the hunt after him continued with unabated vigour. Tidings, too, arrived that Colonel Blood was liberated from the king's bench, by an order of the privy council, and was busily engaged in tracking fugitives.

As it was late in the day when he received these instructions, Mervyn saw that no time was to be lost; but as a journey of thirty miles appeared to Alice of considerable extent, she occasioned a long delay by her preparations. At last, however, the family coach was sufficiently stowed, the four strong Flanders geldings were harnessed, and Mervyn, still in his canonicals, had the satisfaction to see his mistress, himself, and old Alice safely lodged in the vast old vehicle, and rolling over the courtyard. Ducas and a groom followed on horseback, and a coachman, who had been in the Sydney family like an heirloom for nearly fifty years, drove.

Mervyn did not anticipate any danger on the road, yet it was not without apprehensions that he marked the red glare of the sunset on the trees, as they emerged from Sydney's grounds on the Tyburn road, as it was then called. Nevertheless he took Aurora's hand with a smile of congratulation, and held it gently in his own,

to reassure her; for she was pale and trembled violently, and she smiled too with an expression of unbounded trust which troubled him, he scarce knew why. He tried to think it was the melancholy caused by the wild and stormy look of the sunset, and the loud cawing of the hereditary rooks in Sydney's venerable oaks, which seemed as if croaking an everlasting farewell to their departing protectors. A turn of the road shortly after showed them Tyburn, with its rising knolls crowned with broad and verdant trees, in the midst of which towered a gibbet, laden with the bodies of two malefactors recently executed. Mervyn shuddered; and at this moment a horseman galloped past the coach with very great rapidity, who seemed to look eagerly in at Aurora; and momentary as the glance was, Mervyn thought he recognised the ominous visage of Colonel Blood. He took care, however, to keep this terrible suspicion in his own mind; and merely exhorting the steady old coachman to speed, which did not accelerate his accustomed rate in the smallest degree, on they went.

They drove slowly, and according to the resolute will of the old man, who would not have breathed his horses to save his own life; and crossing the river at Westminster, they presently emerged on the Kent road. The town rapidly disappeared, then the scattered suburbs, and finally the open country lay before them. But the darkness increased, and the night wore every appearance of proving a dismal one. The wind was high, and swept the clouds wildly over the face of the

moon, and from time to time broad glares of lightning lit up the sky. Aurora was evidently alarmed, and at every flash looked for courage to her lover, whose smile of love seemed to reassure her.

Thus they proceeded for some time in eloquent silence, until they turned out on a wide unenclosed common, which Mervyn recognised as that of Wandsworth. It was covered with heath, and a range of low hills skirted the horizon, white on the summits with lightning; a dense wood, or rather forest, of larch and fir, skirted the road on the left hand for several miles, but so far as the eye extended in the murky twilight no human being nor human habitation appeared.

Mervyn began now to breathe a little more freely, and he was just turning to felicitate Aurora on their advance to safety, when suddenly a shrill and very melodious whistle met his ear. Mervyn put his head out of the window, and heard a shout of "Halt!" from the wood, and two horsemen with pistols raised galloped on the road before the coach. Five or six more immediately appeared on all sides of the vehicle, presenting their pistols at the windows, and on Mervyn's side a cavalier in a splendid scarlet riding-dress threw the door open and shouted, "Your money or your lives!" Mervyn's desperate reply was drawing a pistol, and firing it at the highwayman, but at the same moment he recognised him in time to sink his aim so that he only shot the horse, which staggered back on its haunches, and then fell dead.

"Harm him not, harm him not!" shouted the high-

wayman, snatching back the levelled pistol of one of his companions as he sprang up. "It is my friend—it is my dear master's son—it is Captain Mervyn!"

"Claude Duval!" exclaimed Mervyn.

"And Mademoiselle Sydney! then is it you whom Blood is in pursuit of!" exclaimed Claude, "I saw him as I left London, an hour ago, and I was to stop a carriage with a lady in it, till he came up with some of his own myrmidons, telling me that it was a rascally puritan eloping with a gentleman's daughter, and that all the plunder should be mine."

"Did he mean to seize the lady?" said Mervyn, hurriedly.

"Yes, and take her to Windsor, to her father there!" said Claude. "But you shall not lack protection from that villain; I and these gallant fellows of mine will escort you within sight of Penshurst, or die to a man in the attempt."

Mervyn hesitated not a moment to accept this proposal. There was no time to be lost, and as Claude's horse was dead, he invited him to join them in the coach. The robbers seemed to obey their leader with the precision and implicitness of a military band, and under his orders four moved in advance, while three formed the rear-guard. This escort, with Ducas and Claude as an auxiliary, seemed sufficient to set all fear at rest, and they now moved rapidly forward over the heath.

Claude took his place beside Alice, but he had no sooner done so, than the old woman exclaimed, "Eh,

mercy, what is here! Master Duval, is it thee in good earnest?"

"What, mother Alice!" exclaimed Claude, "why it is many a long year since I have seen your true-hearted face."

"You have often told me I am not Blood's son," said Mervyn, with affected cheerfulness. "If you know that, dear Duval, you must know who my father really was or is; tell me now, or it may be I shall die in ignorance."

"It were but to taunt you with vain hopes, Master Mervyn," said Claude, musingly; "yet as you say it may be the last time we shall meet, and the malice of your enemies can inflict upon you no worse chances than those which menace you already. Alice," he said, turning to the old nurse, "do you recollect my lord's little foundling, whom you brought up at Mervyn?"

"Ay, and the very night that you took him away as if it were an hour ago, and how he was drowned during the Great Fire," said Alice, sadly.

"Should you know him by any mark?" continued Claude.

"Foreby his great likeness to my lord, he had the mark of a horseshoe on his left breast, and so had his father, and all the true Aumerles since old Lord Mervyn that was a wizard, and rode with the devil to Germany," replied Alice.

"There *is* a horseshoe mark on my breast!" said Mervyn, "and many persons have thought I resembled that race; am I then—a Fitz-Aumerle?"

"You are the lawful heir of Aumerle, rightful owner of all that Howard and his false countess enjoy!" said Duval, vehemently.

"Nay, nay, that cannot be, Claude; my lord's wife had but one child before she eloped with Howard, and it died and was buried in London," said Alice.

"So it was given out, Alice!" replied Duval; "but the foundling whom you nursed was that very child, as my lord acknowledged the night before he was murdered in the Tower; but all the documents and proofs are lost, or in the possession of the murderer, Blood!"

"Mean you to say, Claude, that the Lord Aumerle, he who committed suicide in the Tower, was my father?" said Mervyn, strongly agitated.

"Have you not been acknowledged so by the very hate of your enemies?" replied Claude. "Has not Howard's murtherous wife hunted you in every shape and form, to the death? But suicide your noble father never committed; he was murdered! My poor master!" added he, with great emotion.

"There is much to confirm your tale, Claude; I ever had this foreboding on my heart," said Mervyn: "but if there be but one drop of Aumerle blood in my veins, I will pour it out to the last ere he shall lie in his grave unavenged. Yet, Claude, I have been in those chambers, I have heard the tale related there, and into them there is no entrance for a murderer, unless governor, warders, guards were all in the conspiracy. And is that probable? would Sir John Robinson, a man of ancient

name, would the good old Edwards, share in so black a treason?"

"I know not why nor wherefore, but fire shall not burn that opinion out of me!" said Claude, resolutely. "I will die in it—and that Blood committed the monstrous fact!—*What voice was that which answered at a moment when the earl must have been in the agonies of death?*—that rough and hoarse voice?—his was ever mild and musical!"

"But how could any woman—how could any mother," said Mervyn, with a shudder, "pursue her child to destruction, as Lady Howard hath pursued me?"

"She pursued your father to destruction before you!" said Claude. "I have heard strange accounts of how she was compelled by her father to marry her cousin, the Lord Aumerle, although she was in love with the profligate Howard of Eskricke—but that my lord never knew till too late. But she had many lovers besides—among the rest, Colonel Blood, then a dashing young soldier of fortune; and a man whom you knew well, Master Mervyn, a Belgian noble of high rank, who, after her marriage with Lord Aumerle, turned Jesuit, and became rector of St. Omer."

"Father Van Huysman!" exclaimed Mervyn.

"Yes," replied Claude. "However, there was always a kind of unhappiness in their union. My lord picked me up in Normandy only a few months before your birth, Master Mervyn. That was in London; and while she was yet scarce able to lift her head from the pillow, she summoned my lord to her bedside, and

feigning that she thought herself in danger of death, and could not die with the dismal thought on her conscience of how she had wronged him—in brief, that the newly-born infant was not my lord's son but Howard of Eskricke's!—Do not blame your poor father, Mervyn, but it worked like madness in his brain, and he consented to all her cunning plots—gave out that you were dead in your cradle, and sent you privately to nurse at Mervyn—allowed her a separate maintenance, though he would not agree to a divorce lest she should marry Howard—challenged him and had nigh killed him but for—"

"Hark! do you not hear the tramp of horse?" interrupted Mervyn.

"It is the rumbling of distant thunder!" said Aurora, trembling and clinging to Mervyn, but the latter and Claude both looked eagerly out in the direction of London. It was now pitch-dark; but by the frequent glare of lightning, and the continued hollow echo on the turf, they became but too well aware that they were pursued by a party of horsemen, though at a considerable distance, for they appeared as if on the verge of the vast heath.

"This will never do—they will soon overtake this old lumbering mail we are in!" exclaimed Claude. "I like to feel the free turf beneath my feet; let us mount, Master Mervyn, and do you take the lady before you, and we can leave the coach behind, crawling after us, to deceive the enemy."

Aurora eagerly intimated her assent to this proposal,

and Mervyn, perceiving that it was the only course which remained short of a downright battle, hastily complied. Ducas and one of the highwaymen resigned their steeds at the request of their masters, and though Alice was in great tremours at being left, Mervyn mounted her young mistress before him, and with a mixture of delight and terror felt her arm encircle his neck, while he clasped his arm round her waist to keep her firmly in her awkward seat. The cavalcade now proceeded at a brisk rate over the heath; it consisted of the two leaders, and of those highwaymen whose horses were able to keep pace. Claude, however, looked back from time to time, and announced that they were still pursued, for he distinctly saw the gleam of armour, and the clatter of hoofs on the stony road was very audible. Unluckily, too, the horses showed signs of flagging, and despite a vigorous use of the spur, the pursuers were obviously gaining on them.

Neither Mervyn nor Claude ventured to hint this fact even to one another, and their hopes were now somewhat reanimated by perceiving, in the hollow of a steep hill which they were descending, a little scattered hamlet which seemed to offer some chance of protection. The low thatched roofs and quiet cottages, each bosomed in its apple-orchard and rustic garden of cabbages and marigolds, seemed to sleep in "spite of thunder;" the little village-church and churchyard rose in the midst, and a broad brawling brook, crossed by a bridge formed of a single oak, whose living trunk still shot out verdant suckers, flowed between our riders and that once

invariable accompaniment of an English village—the village green. It was a wide open sward, flanked irregularly by the churchyard, and by the straggling cottages of those who, after their calm and innocent lives had attained an answering close, slept there with ancestors whose chronicles were only a rude record on a gravestone, or the babbling tongue of some old grandmother by her winter fire. A great deal of wormwood grew on the green, and its rich scent seemed to meet the travellers like the welcome of a friend.

Towards this village they now pressed with renewed vigour, and Mervyn's horse was dashing through the stream in gallant style, when a sudden flash of lightning showed the animal its own shadow in the waters, and, with a snort of terror and a wild bristling of the mane, it rolled back on its haunches, and made a furious attempt to back out of the stream. In vain did Mervyn plunge his spurs into its reeking sides; and now the voices of the pursuers were distinctly heard, and a rushing mass appeared on the summit of the acclivity.

"Stand for it, lads!" cried the gallant Claude. "On, Master Mervyn, we will make you five minutes good!"

As he spoke, urged by one desperate plunge of his bloody spur, Mervyn's horse sprang forward; but it was too late, the whole mass of pursuers was on them; and such was the eagerness of the chase, that they galloped past, whirling their horses round to head the fugitives. Mervyn merely discerned that they were soldiers, and, drawing his sword, he rushed on, determined to force himself a passage, or perish in the attempt. He heard

Blood's voice shouting, "No firing! look to the girl!" and suddenly a sword flashed at his head. He parried the stroke, and mad with terror, lest Aurora should be hurt in the *mêlée*, struck furiously on; but his assailant gave no inch of way, and a ready weapon met his at every stroke. All this took place in almost utter darkness, and Aurora's shrieks seemed to ring the very sky, without summoning any assistance, though many of the villagers appeared at their lattices in great consternation.

This kind of conflict lasted but a few moments; Mervyn's antagonist seemed merely waiting till he had exhausted his strength in these vain blows, and now in turn pressed upon him. Mervyn felt that his strength was failing fast, and his terror for Aurora's safety hindered him from acting with energy; but he continued backing his horse, and sustaining his guard with difficulty against the increasing fury of his assailant. In fact, his fate seemed inevitable, when suddenly a stream of lightning blazed over the combatants, and he recognised that his antagonist was Blood himself, and the latter that his was Mervyn! This recognition seemed to produce the effect of a spell upon the colonel—he grew pale as ashes, his horse reared back, and his arm hung wavering in the air, as if paralyzed. But a more than mortal fury seemed to seize Mervyn, and gave a giant's strength to his exhausted nerves—urging his horse madly on his antagonist, and yelling "Murderer!" in a tone to appal the stoutest heart, he struck the colonel a blow which laid him prostrate and shivered his own weapon. The effort exhausted his strength

and that of his horse also, and it fell head foremost, with Mervyn and his senseless mistress in his arms. His head struck with violence against a stone, and he became insensible. He recovered only to find himself fastened on a horse behind a soldier, and surrounded by a guard, riding slowly on the road to London.

CHAPTER XIII.

A ROYAL PLOT.

THE gray light of morning was breaking over the towers and spires and the majestic river of London, when a coach drove slowly and weariedly up to the gates of Aumerle House. It stopped, and two figures alighted;—one a powerful man, wrapped in a riding-cloak and with his head bound up; the other a youthful woman, on whose beautiful features sat a ghastly paleness and an expression of resolute hopelessness, which showed like a statue of despair carved by some Grecian sculptor. They ascended a flight of stairs into an apartment, in which, busily engaged over some papers by the light of waning lamps, sat four figures—three men and a woman.

"It is he—it is Blood!" exclaimed one of the former, starting up, "and the lovely little fugitive herself!"

"You seem horribly gashed, sir! What has become of the leader—of Mervyn in brief?" exclaimed the countess, for it was she.

"Woman, you have broken our compact—you have falsely cheated me!" replied Blood, fiercely. "Your son is in Newgate."

"Ha! Lloyd has done his part of the task well then!" exclaimed the foremost cavalier, who, to the dreamy eye of Aurora, seemed the king, as the other two seemed to be Lord Howard and the chief justice, Jeffreys. "I thank my Lady Howard for giving me that hint to send him as your coadjutor, or it seems you had scarce permitted my warrant to hold good as far as Seven Oaks."

"I confess, my liege, I would have prevented this dreadful woman from committing the murder of her son!" exclaimed Blood.

"My son!" shrieked the countess, clasping her hands wildly. "Your majesty hears!—they call this traitor and condemned villain my son! I cannot, I will not endure such slander!"

"Peace, countess!—it matters nothing whose son he be, were he my own!" said Charles. "Mistress Sydney, hear me;—I am grieved that you should have so far disgraced yourself as to fly with a notorious thief and traitor, and thereby tarnish your reputation for ever; but Providence, in a remarkable manner, revealed your projects, and set one thief to catch another; for Oates's complaint about his stolen canonicals set us on what scent our fox lay. Now, madam, methinks the whirligig has

gone fairly round. Your father and this Mervyn are utterly in my power—a word from you saves and loads them with wealth and honours, or consigns them both to the block."

"To the block then let them go!" said Aurora, in a faint but determined tone. "A thousand and a thousand times will they bless me for the preference. But I will not survive them. I am Sydney's daughter, and Aumerle's wife in all but the name—and I will die so."

"Put Mervyn's name into my Rye House list," said Charles, turning with a livid look of wrath to Lord Howard.

"My liege, I pray you, do not force that man's blood upon me too!" said Howard.

"Then live to be a beggar, thou drivelling falterer!" shouted Lady Howard. "Live to be stripped of wealth and honour and life for want of one poor word;—for, sire,—yes, I do acknowledge before the king that Mervyn is my son, Aumerle's lawful heir—and now refuse to gibbet him if you dare!"

Howard stared aghast at his countess, and even the king was struck dumb with surprise.

"Why, 'tis true, he was concerned in the Rye House matter," said Howard, taking a deep gulp of breath, "but, faith, I am deeper in the mud than he in the mire."

"You have our word for aught that concerns yourself, Howard," said Charles, eagerly. "It shall be so!" he continued, after a moment's pause. "Yes, one blow shall rid you of an insolent pretender, and me of a false

traitor and rival. Farewell, Mistress Sydney! farewell for ever! I have broken your chains at length, and never, never will we meet again!"

"Yes, we shall meet again, sire," said Aurora, with a wild smile. "We shall meet again, king Charles, at that bar where the oppressor and the oppressed are equal, and a vain title shall not protect tyranny and murder from their just punishment."

"Farewell till then, madam!" replied Charles, furiously. "Meanwhile, this earth at least is ours."

And he strode rapidly towards the door, followed by all the personages of the scene except Aurora, who threw herself with a sigh of exhaustion into a chair. She was now alone, and she sat for some time apparently in a profound revery, yet without a single distinct idea, unconsciously gazing at the pale green light of the dawning day, playing on the waters of the Thames below. A deep sigh, or rather groan, behind, startled her sense, but scarcely her reasoning faculties, and she looked round vacantly at the intruder. It was Lord Howard.

"Dear Aurora, rouse yourself! it is only one of your poorest worshippers!" he said, with a passionate look which seemed to strike on some chord of memory, and awaken the half paralyzed machinery. "Look, to this dark and terrible night what a most lovely morn has followed! and even in the midst of this storm which rages around us both, a glorious rainbow of hope arises. Hear me, Aurora, you may yet save your father and

Mervyn, foil the tyrant at his own weapons, and make one happy who has long loved you dearer than life!"

"What means Lord Howard?" she said, with a glance full of tumult and horror of thought.

"I am the only witness against them both," replied Howard, hurriedly. "If I were dead or in France to-morrow, what evidence is there against them? Fly then with me, and in some distant land, far from the tyrant's power—" he paused, overcome by the withering eye which met his. Surprise,and unspeakable scorn, mingled with a wild sense of the ludicrous—strange as it may appear—shone in its lightning. There was almost a minute's pause.

"And is my Lady Howard to be of the party?" she said, at last with a slight hysteric laugh.

"Lady Howard! I hate her; she is a savage beast, and no woman!" said Howard, vehemently. "I hate her! she has too long held me in her iron thralls. The woman that can pursue her only child with such mortal hatred is none! Talk not to me of Lady Howard! I abhor her worse than the pestilence!"

"And me you love? this offer is to Aurora Sydney?" said the lady, looking at him with an amazement which defied all the powers of expression even of her resplendent eye.

"Love you!" echoed Howard, looking carefully round the gallery, "why, I adore you, loveliest of women!" and throwing himself on his knees, he clutched her hands as he exclaimed, "Fly with me, to Italy or

Iceland; where you are 'tis paradise! Dearest creature! I am wholly thine, and have been from the first moment I beheld you!"

"Lord Howard," said Aurora, deliberately, "I have long deemed you a villain, but knew not till now that you were a fool."

"Nor I," said a voice, which made them both start, and raising the tapestry, a figure stalked in which almost froze Aurora to look upon. It was the countess, but changed as if by some supernatural agency. Upright, rigid, and pale as a corpse, she stood there, her countenance working horribly with a demoniac confusion of passions, and her white lips wavering with a smile so ghastly that human eye could scarcely bear to look upon it. Both Howard and Aurora started up, and seemed held by a spell of fear.

"Do you recollect me, Mistress Sydney?" said the countess, at last. "My Lord Howard seems to have forgotten me; I am still Eleanor d'Aumerle, my lord."

"Lady Howard—I—that is—on my honour, Lady Howard, I was but earnestly pressing the king's suit!" stammered Howard.

"Save yourself farther perjury; I overheard the whole conversation, my lord," interrupted the countess, in a tone of supernatural calm; "I overheard all. O God, this is just indeed! and have I sacrificed all for this?"

"I spoke but in madness; I said I know not what!" said Howard, confusedly. "I beseech you, Lady Howard, glare not at me with those wild eyes; I am

weary of your harsh trammels. I loved you once, but—but—who can love a tigress athirst for the blood of her own offspring?"

"I will remove this complaint—I will yield to the feeling which hath so often tugged at my heart!" said the countess, wildly. "Go! you are a beggar! the heir of Aumerle shall sit once more in his father's halls, and this ladye-love of yours shall be his bride!"

"Never, madam! since you make me desperate, you shall learn what desperation can do!" said Howard, fiercely. "I will bring your son's head to the block, or lay my own in its stead; I swear it!" and he rushed out of the apartment.

"Reginald! thy blood is avenged!" gasped the wretched countess, and clasping her hands wildly to Heaven, she fell at full length on the floor.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRIAL OF SYDNEY.

A ROYAL reign of terror now commenced; arrest followed arrest, the noble Russell bled on the scaffold, Essex committed suicide, and on the insufficient evidence which had condemned Russell, Sydney was put on his trial by the award of the grand jury. He attempted to raise objections to the indictment, but Jeffreys overruled all. It was even rumoured that his daughter was accused of treasonable knowledge of the conspiracy, and it was certain that she was held in a kind of imprisonment in Aumerle House, none of her relations but her uncle, Lord Leicester, being allowed to see her.

The only hope which the friends of Sydney now entertained, was the fact, that only one witness—Howard of Eskricke—could depose to any overt act of treason, and the law imperatively required two wit-

nesses. In the midst of these speculations, however, men were astounded with tidings that Mervyn had volunteered to bear witness against his former friend and benefactor, and that his evidence was that on which the crown-lawyers depended for implicating Sydney in the conspiracy of the Rye House! At first this report met with general incredulity, but when the circumstances under which he had first appeared on the eventful stage of the popish plot, were remembered—people shook their heads and knew not what to think. Altogether the trial was looked forward to with the most intense interest, and was the sole engrossing topic of all men's conversation.

At length the day arrived—that day the brightest and saddest of the great martyrology of English liberty—the 21st of November, 1683. It was about nine o'clock on the morning of that memorable day that Mervyn entered Westminster Hall, escorted by a strong guard, and as a witness—for in no other character had he apparently any office there. The hall was crowded almost to the groined rafters of the immense building. Neither judges nor accused were, however, arrived, and Mervyn was for a time the undivided object of the public curiosity. All that could be remarked in him was the deadly whiteness of his complexion and the extraordinary brilliancy of his eyes. He sat down between his halberdiers, in a box reserved for the witnesses, seemingly indifferent to the buzz of abhorrence which greeted his *entrée*, and took a deliberate survey of the spectacle.

Many a face did he recognise, with which he had been familiar in his court days, seeming to look on with great satisfaction; among these was Chiffinch, who gave him a malicious nod. But few of the popular party were present, and the chief of these was the Lord Cavendish, and a very different personage—Dr. Oates. That reverend man was wedged in among a great throng of the rabble, but his palmy days were evidently over; he looked haggard and ragged, gaping with his enormous mouth, while dark signs of agitation streamed down his face.

Averting his eyes with disgust from this wretch, the looks of Mervyn rested for a moment on the peculiar countenance of a lawyer, who was apparently busied among some papers at the judge's table, where he remained during the trial. In spite of his huge gray whig and chalked eyebrows, Mervyn felt positive that he recognised the features of the king—of Charles himself. But again his attention was attracted by the figure of Lady Howard, seated among a bevy of high-born ladies in a gallery above. She wore a black vizor, and seemed to sit wrapt in her own dark and unearthly thoughts, while the court dames about her prattled and exchanged coquetteries with the gallants who surrounded them.

This leisurely survey was terminated by the entrance of the judges, rustling in ermine and crimson robes: foremost of these, strutting like a turkey-cock, marched the chief justice. Immediately afterwards the pikesmen of the Tower appeared at the great entrance of the hall, and

at first only the tall figure of Sydney was discerned. He was dressed in his usual sober style, and his countenance was perfectly serene, without either dejection or defiance in its expression. Several gentlemen of the popular party were around him; but suddenly the pikesmen opened their ranks, making a kind of passage to the bar, and with a thrill of indescribable emotion, Mervyn perceived that a female form leaned upon Sydney's arm. It was Aurora.

She was dressed in white, except that she wore a hood and mantle of black velvet, which hung in graceful folds around her perfect form. It was fastened at the waist with a silver girdle, which Mervyn remembered to have given her. The heroic blood of her great race seemed to animate her, for she moved with a firm step, and seemed scarcely to need the fond encouragement which her father continued to give her till she reached the bar. She curtsied gracefully to the judges, who looked at her in much surprise, and stood calmly while the proclamation for the information was read. Mervyn could not conjecture the meaning of this scene, until Sydney requested of the court that he might have pen, ink, and paper, which were granted. He then in a calm tone added, "My lords, I have to ask your indulgence for another request: it is, that you will allow my daughter to write for me. She would not be behind my Lady Russell in duty and love, and being accustomed to pen at my dictation, will be all the help I shall need."

"We consent, though we would spare the lady such

trouble and pain," said Jeffreys respectfully. "Usher, set Mistress Sydney a chair and bureau—and God speed her task and bring it to a happy issue!" Aurora bowed meekly.

Some few preliminaries were gone through, the bureau and chair made their appearance at the bar, and Aurora seated herself to her task with a stifled sigh, which was yet audible all over the court, so deep and general was the silence. She drew off her glove and threw back her hood, revealing a countenance cold and tranquil as a beautiful corpse, the eyelids purple with incessant weeping, the lips white and parted. Indeed she looked so like marble that Mervyn's blood ran cold in his veins. He tried in vain to catch her eye, to re-assure her with the desperate meaning of his, but she never raised it from the paper.

The proclamation was now made, in a court deathly still, and Sydney addressed the judges, renewing his application for a copy of the indictment, and producing the statute of Edward III., by which it was assigned to all accused persons. But Jeffreys sovereignly disposed of this objection, citing the decision of the judges in Sir H. Vane's case. In vain did Sydney argue that judges are but interpreters, not makers of laws,—the chief justice lost what little temper he ever had, and ordered the arraignment to proceed, declaring that they could not spend their time in discourses to captivate the people. And so a judge's rule set aside a law of the three estates of the realm—by no means for the first nor last time. The jury were then empanelled,

after a few challenges, and an observer might have drawn an evil augury to Sydney from the gay dress and courtly wigs of the jurors.

Doblen, the junior crown council, opened the pleas. His speech was merely a repetition of the indictment. Sir Robert Sawyer, the attorney-general, then rose. He laid down the order in which the crown meant to produce its evidence. In the first place they should prove a general design for raising a rebellion; in the next the share which the prisoner had in it. They should prove that he was one of the council of six; that various consultations were held; the treasonable nature of those consultations; the sending of Aaron Smith into Scotland. A traitorous libel, which it pleased the prisoner to call a treatise on government, would next be proved to be his work, and the abominable principles entertained in it would prove how much his heart and soul were in this matchless treason.

"Finally," said the attorney in an impressive and solemn tone, "it has pleased heaven to place in our hands, though at the eleventh hour, undoubted proofs of this gentleman's participation in the bloody treason of the Rye House. One of the conspirators, moved doubtless by remorse for so matchless an offence (when I say matchless, I endeavour, as becomes one who had his share in the framing of that most clement and merciful act of oblivion—to forget the martyrdom of his late most sacred wronged majesty) moved by remorse, I say, for so matchless an offence, for he hath no hope of mercy held out, nor is any intended that

I wot of—one of the conspirators will appear at your bar, to bear witness against the prisoner in that matter, the which, though not conclusive in law, will add its moral weight to the certain overt proofs we shall produce."

Mervyn saw that Aurora raised her eyes, with a broken-hearted expression, to the lawyer's face, but they sunk again instantly.

"Gentlemen," concluded the attorney-general, "if we prove these matters to you, I doubt not you will do right to the king and kingdom, and show your abhorrence of these republican principles; which, if put in practise, will not only destroy the king, but the best monarchy in the world!"

The solicitor-general, Finch, now called the evidence, in the order which his leader had marked out. In vain Sydney protested against the injustice of proving a general charge, and demanded that the evidence against himself only should be heard. Jeffreys overruled his objection, and cited, with bitterness, the similar course pursued against the victims of the popish plot.

The first witness examined was West, who merely gave a general account of Shaftesbury's conspiracy, its disappointment, and the projects which followed, abandoned for various causes. Then came Colonel Rumsey—who now appeared in the character he had probably played all along—of a treacherous spy. He detailed the meetings at Sheppard's and Hampden's, especially that one in which the council of six determined on its

operations. Thus far all seemed to go swimmingly for the crown.

Keeling, the vintner, was next examined, whose evidence, though vague and unsatisfactory, went to support the general fact of a conspiracy.

"We charge him with conspiring," said Sir Robert, rather apologetically, "and there must be confederates in the case. Now we come to the prisoner!—We will call my Lord Howard, who was one of the persons that did consult."

The crier repeated the name in a strong nasal tone, and the nobleman in question appeared. All eyes were fixed upon him with a great variety of expressions.

He was dressed in all his usual sumptuousness, but his face was pale, and his eyes bloodshot with drink; indeed he looked as if scarcely recovered from some excessive debauch. He had the effrontery to raise his hat to Aurora, after he had bowed to the court, but she took no notice of him, continuing calmly to write, as she had done through all the proceedings hitherto. Sydney looked at him and sighed deeply, but said not a word.

Howard gave his evidence in a full uninterrupted flow of words, the self-possession of which was almost marvellous. He commenced his narrative from the failure of Shaftesbury's plan, to the forming of the cabal, as he called it, detailing the various consults with such malicious glosses, interpretation, and exaggerations as marked the rancour of the renegade. Mer-

vyn he described as the life, the arch-conspirator in the Rye House Plot; though he insinuated that Sydney and the six used him as their instrument in the whole. He asserted with a laugh of bitter scorn that Sydney had even cajoled him with hopes of giving him his daughter in marriage—him!—the base son of a notorious bravo, a traitor who had in turn betrayed every party, even the best of king's and master's. Mervyn looked at Aurora to see if she showed any emotion as she wrote these words—but the white hand journeyed on, and the marble visage showed still as perfectly calm as death. Howard seemed to increase in violence and bitterness from this circumstance, till Jeffreys himself admonished him that Master Mervyn was not then upon his trial. Howard then ceased.

"Will you ask him any questions, Mr. Sydney?" said the chief justice, who had been noting down, with great diligence.

"I have no questions to ask him," said Sydney, mournfully.

"Silence—you know the proverb," said the attorney, maliciously.

Two witnesses were then produced who proved that certain Scottish gentlemen came up to London, under pretext of making a purchase in Carolina, who absconded on discovery of the plot. These men were alleged to be commissioners to concert a rebellion.

"We have done with this piece of our evidence," said Sir Robert. "Now to show that while this emissary was in Scotland, at the same time the colonel (which will be another overt act of treason) was writing

a treasonable pamphlet. I will call you the witnesses. It is all of his own writings."

Sir Philip Lloyd then described his seizure of the papers; three witnesses proved the handwriting, Sydney only slightly objecting that similitude of hands could be no proof. The attorney then directed a clerk to read certain passages which he pointed out—passages which breathed the very sublime of republicanism, such as it appeared in the grand theories of Milton—an august revery of universal virtue, happiness, and liberty. The main arguments, and which he inculcated with all the vigour of his athletic logic, were: that the source of all just power is the people; that the people are judges in their own case, inasmuch as it concerns only themselves; that the general revolt of a nation can never be called a rebellion; and, finally, he denied that the power of calling and dissolving parliament was in the king: a necessary dogma at a time when, if a parliament met at all, it must meet in spite of the king.

"So much we shall make use of," said Sir Robert, placidly. "If the colonel please to have any part read to explain it, he may."

The sheets were then handed over to Sydney.

"I do not know what use to make of it—I can read it," said he, tranquilly laying them down.

"Ay, no doubt of it, better than any man here," said Jeffreys, with a bantering smile. "Fix on any part that you have a mind to have read."

"I do not know what to say to it,—to read it in pieces thus," replied Sydney.

"I perceive," said Jeffreys, labouring to entrap the prisoner; "I perceive you have disposed them under certain heads: what heads would you have read?"

"My lord, let him give an account that did it," replied Sydney, drily.

"My lord, we will not delay Colonel Sydney from entering on his defence," said the attorney, "only we have this piece of evidence to give further. One of his accomplices was my Lord Russell: we will give in evidence his conviction."

The record of Lord Russell's conviction was then read, and Sydney listened to it with some slight marks of emotion; but he smiled encouragingly at Aurora, observing that she grew white almost to lividness.

"But, my lord," again urged Sydney, "I desire to know upon what statute I am indicted."

"My lord, I will give as plain an answer," replied Sir Robert. "You are indicted upon the old statute of 25 Edward III."

"They have proved a paper found in my study of Caligula and Nero," said Sydney: "that is compassing the death of the king, is it?"

"That I shall tell the jury," replied Jeffreys. "The point in law you are to take from the court, gentlemen; whether there be fact sufficient, that is your duty to consider."

Sydney took some papers from his daughter and glancing at them, put them down with a troubled look. Sir Robert was again speaking.

"My lord," he said, "I am about to close the case

for his majesty,—and not only for his majesty, but for every man of you that live under his blessed, mild, and most sacred government, and with the testimony of him of whom I spoke, which, inasmuch as it substantiates the fact of the colonel's adhesion to the Rye conspiracy, which is as it were the marrow of the whole, I may well style the keystone of this great arch of proof which I have cemented so together, that neither the torrents of party violence, nor the slow majestic waves of history, shall in any way shake it. Call Master Mervyn Blood, *alias* Aumerle, as he something arrogantly bastardizeth himself at times."

Aurora started, and her father pressed her hand in silence; the summons was repeated by the crier, but ere it ceased, Mervyn was at the bar. "I am here, my lord—no bastard—but the lawful heir of the late Earl Aumerle," he said in a tone of perfect composure, and somehow its deadly fixedness of purpose chilled the sudden uproar which arose into a breathless silence of expectation.

"This is no time for us, Master Mervyn, to investigate your claims, real or pretended," said Jeffreys, with cajoling softness. "Speak the truth in God's name, whatever your own may be."

"I shall, my lord, and His lightnings descend upon my head if I speak falsely, but a word!" said Mervyn, with solemn elevation of tone. "My lord, I am told the grand jury have returned a true bill against me, and I desire to plead guilty to the conspiracy laid to my charge."

"Let his plea be recorded," said Jeffreys, eagerly. "But do not let any false hope entangle you, sir; his majesty is determined that justice shall take its course in all these matters, and especially in your case, lest men should say the officers of his justice bought your testimony at the high price of a traitorous life being spared."

"It is what I expect—what I implore—what I demand!" said Mervyn. "Death, death—nothing but death! I will seal the truth of my testimony with my blood."

There was an energy and desperate determination in his manner which struck awe even into Jeffreys himself.

"Well then, sir," he said, "proceed! God forbid I should oppose the disburthening of your unhappy conscience."

Mervyn drew up his tall figure, and folded his arms sedately, and his noble features never seemed so intinct with beauty as now when fired with the magnanimous madness which irradiated them. He looked around. He saw the Lady Howard gazing fiercely at him—he saw the mysterious lawyer, whom he had previously noticed, glaring with malicious joy in his face—and he turned from the myriad accusing eyes around with a smile of bitter scorn, and met the mournful eye of Sydney. There was no reproach in it—it was sorrow, manly, serene—but more affecting than the wildest outbursts could have been. Mervyn seemed to gather strength from the general injustice,

and he glanced at Aurora. Their eyes met. She was reclining back in her chair, but a light flame-coloured blush wavered on her cheek, as if the spirit within blushed, rather than the flesh without. What a world of meaning was in that glance!—the love, the grief, the suffering of ages, the million reproaches of as many violated trusts, an immortality of anguish and despair. Had he indeed come there to play the villanous part for which all present gave him credit, that look must have smote his heart more keenly than a dagger.

He began in a clear, calm, melancholy tone, and as he did so he saw that Aurora resumed her pen, looking like the angel of the fiery record, so beautiful, serene, and passionless. He entreated his lordship's pardon for a short digression while he briefly stated the circumstances of his first connexion with Sydney—it was necessary, he said, to the story. He gave a rapid sketch of his early life—by what machinations Oates brought him over to England—the manner in which Sydney saved his life. Sydney's counsel would have interrupted this as irrelevant, but Jeffreys silenced them; the tide was turned, and every thing against the popish plot and its contrivers was acceptable to the sitters in high places.

"I have never been believed," said Mervyn, at this point. "But I have said it in all places, and before all persons—when it might benefit and when it might destroy me—Oates was the real murderer of Sir Edmondbury Godfrey!"

There was a general but suppressed murmur, and a voice from the crowd sobbed, "O Loard, defend thy saints!"

"Who speaks there?—I know thine accursed tones, murderer!" exclaimed Mervyn fiercely. "But the voice of blood will no longer be choked. Come forth, thou man of blood, and I will wring the truth from thy black heart!"

"You go too far, captain; the king cannot be served thus," said Jeffreys kindly. "Keep to your present subject; I doubt me not we shall have to do with the Lord's sinner at some other day."

Mervyn became calm again; he related how Sydney saved his life, and seemed to dwell on all his goodness, as if to exaggerate the magnitude of his subsequent fall. He described Sydney's calm and literary life, his generosity, his noble sentiments on all occasions, in a language of panegyric which apparently pleased Jeffreys, for he thought it was only a rhetorical artifice to heighten the effect of what was to follow. His imagination seemed to kindle as he advanced, and he burst into one of the most eloquent eulogiums that had ever been heard within the walls of Westminster, but which barely did justice to the illustrious subject. The chief justice began to show tokens of surprise and displeasure.

"Well, well, Master Mervyn," he interrupted, "I hope there is no one so bad but he hath his better qualities, and Mr. Sydney hath doubtless many matching his great rank. But we must not have the jury

stuffed with fulsome speeches, and our time wasted. Speak only what is near to the accusation."

"My lord, all that I have said points to the matter at issue," said Mervyn; "it was by these great and noble qualities that Colonel Sydney won from me that implicit faith and confidence which hath brought us both here. He first taught me that the people of England are born free; that their rights are inalienable; that he who endeavours to deprive them of their exercise is a tyrant; and that it is lawful to bring tyrants to justice."

"Speak not in such generalities, sir," said Jeffreys, "say plainly—meant he that it was lawful to assassinate or otherwise slay a king?"

"To bring tyrants to justice!" thundered Mervyn, till the hall rang again.

"And he considered his present most gracious majesty a tyrant?" interposed the attorney-general. "Let the witness take his own way, my lord! fair and softly goes far."

"Sydney defined a tyrant to be a man who ruled without consent of the governed, or in a manner which they did not approve," replied Mervyn. "I pretend not to say what deductions he drew from these premises, but I drew these—mark ye all, I in my particular person,—that Charles II. is an atrocious tyrant, and that it is lawful to slay him like a wild beast; though it were more becoming the justice of a great nation to bring him to the block by deliberate process of law, as it was done to the late Charles, his father."

"We see in what school this unhappy youth hath been educate;" said Sir Robert, compassionately. "And thus seasoned, no marvel you were ready prepared to aid and abet in the desperate plot to murder his majesty (whom Heaven preserve!) at the Rye House."

"I had a tempter, my lord, indeed!" replied Mervyn. "None but the fiend ever fell without one—a false, a villanous tempter! But I was seasoned as you say, well seasoned, with insufferable wrongs. All the world has heard them. I was wrongfully accused, imprisoned, stripped of all but my vengeance, by those who knew my innocence. Falsely or truly, I believed that his majesty was my chief wronger and oppressor, and the wrongs my country suffered too seemed to me to sanctify the arm of private vengeance."

"But the tempter!—the tempter, sir!" exclaimed Jeffreys.

"There were but three of us engaged in the Rye House conspiracy," continued Mervyn, quietly—"but three of us:—you know the plot, the plan, the failure."

"It was sufficiently expounded at my Lord Russell's trial," said the chief-justice.

"I know nothing on what grounds my Lord Russell was convicted, being in a dungeon this many a day," said Mervyn. "But I do hope his blood was not shed in that cause, for he was as innocent of it as any saint in heaven!"

"Pish!—we are not here to try my Lord Russell, nor my Lord Russell's ghost," said Jeffreys, peevishly.

"Speak to the point at issue—tell these gentlemen what project was formed by this *imperium in imperio*, this second council of *three*, and how its barbarous plans were to be perfected."

Mervyn detailed the circumstances of the plot, precisely as we have narrated them, but as yet he named no names; he spoke only of the council of three; but the part played by Howard, all present silently ascribed to Sydney.

"Now, gentlemen, did you ever hear of a horrider plot, talk as they will of the popishers?" exclaimed Jeffreys. "So you for your own part, Master Mervyn, were desirous rather to secure the king's person than to slay him then and there? I must say that showed some better nature in you! But this tempter, whom you name not, was desirous to glut his traitorous thirst in his majesty's most sacred blood?"

"But what hath all this to do with me, my lord?" said Sydney, much agitated. "Surely this witness cannot mean to accuse me; I never heard of any such plot till my dear friend, the Lord Russell, was executed for it."

"Ay, truly, in cases like these of life and death, we must not deal in blindman's buff," said Jeffreys, wrinkling his terrible eyes. "State clearly and by name who were these three monstrous conspirators, and in especial him whom you still style the Tempter."

"I myself was one—Colonel Rumbold—'tis no harm to say it, since he hath escaped—was another," said Mervyn, "and the third—" he was interrupted by a

fearful shriek from Aurora, who, clasping her hands, hung over the bar in agony.

"And the third," he continued, amidst the most deathly stillness—"the third—the tempter, who now like the fiend accuseth his miserable victims, was the Lord Howard of Eskricke!"

There was a full minute of profound silence.

"Villain! what means this?—art thou mad?" exclaimed Jeffreys, in his most tremendous voice, and half-rising in his judgment-seat. "Darest thou palter with the king's justice?"

"Justice!" shouted Mervyn. "Did he wield the thunder, I would defy and scorn him, as I do thee, thou blood-thirsty judge! Tyrants! I have deceived you. I am here to die—but it shall be with the truth on my lips. Sydney is innocent of all part or share or knowledge, in the Rye House conspiracy. Howard, Rumbold, and I, were the sole planners, the sole confidants, the sole executors of that glorious attempt! And now do your worst—I defy the worst that man can do!"

There was another pause of profound astonishment—it was broken by a shout of applause from the immense audience, which all Jeffreys's furious gestures and yells could not for some moments suppress.

"My son!—I knew thou couldst not mean to betray me," said Sydney, with a smile of benignant tenderness, and a triumphant glance at the reanimated countenance of his daughter, which shone with an expression of celestial joy.

"The man is mad!" exclaimed Sir Robert, in the

first moment of restored silence. "His crimes, wounds, and imprisonment have crazed him."

"No, no, he is not mad, he is more knave than fool," said Jeffreys, blackening with rage. "He hath fairly deceived us, but himself more. He hath confessed what we might have had some difficulty in proving. Clerk, enter his plea of guilty, and remove him to his former place till we have done with Mr. Sydney. It was well, Sir Robert, that you put small stress on this witness's evidence; your charge, methinks, hath legs enough of its own to stand on."

"Gentlemen of the jury, you have heard the truth," exclaimed Mervyn, as they removed him. "If you condemn the prisoner, his blood be upon you and your children's heads for ever and for ever!"

"Gag him if he will not be silent!" exclaimed the chief justice.

"Will not this gap in the state close till it has swallowed up all that is noblest in it!" said Sydney. "O Rome, Rome! boast of thy Curtius as thou wilt—here is one whose glory outdazzles his."

It was some time before the excitement of this extraordinary scene subsided, and Aurora resumed her occupation. It was wonderful that, although her lover's fate was sealed by this outburst, she seemed restored by some magic to life and happiness. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes sparkled, there was animation, courage, defiance, in the very grace of her beautiful form, in every gesture, in the haughty smile on her lip.

Sydney examined a note which his counsel handed

over to him, and began his defence. He denied that he had any right to take notice of the papers laid to his charge. It was impossible to prove that they were his writing; his hand might be counterfeited—a very common artifice in that intriguing age. He then alleged the law of Edward III., by which he could not be indicted, much less tried and condemned, without the evidence of two witnesses to each branch of the indictment. Here was only one—the Lord Howard. He then proceeded to expose the inconsistencies and improbabilities of Howard's narrative, which indeed existed in the conspiracy itself, from the great variety of plans and cross-plans pursued by the different ramifications of plotters. Sydney had had but one motive, but one course of action, and he had not the least idea by what an infinite variety of threads it was crossed. This part of his defence was evidently the composition of a lawyer; it abounded in legal subtleties, far-fetched illustrations, clenching arguments on little points; but it emerged finally on the broad ground that, as there was but one witness, and the law required two, to an indictment of treason, he was not obliged in any manner to plead to it.

"This is a point of fact whether there be two witnesses," said Jeffreys. "I tell you beforehand one witness is not enough."

"Why then there is my Lord Howard, and not another," said Sydney.

"Nay, do not make these inferences," replied Jeffreys. "I will tell the jury, if there be not two wit-

nesses, as the law requires in this matter, they ought to acquit you."

"You confound me—I cannot stir," said Sydney, vehemently. "You talk of a conspiracy; what is a conspiracy to kill the king? Are there any more witnesses than one for levying of war?"

"Pray do not deceive yourself," replied Jeffreys; "you must not think the court and you intend to enter into a dialogue. Answer to the fact; if there be not sufficient fact the jury will acquit you."

Thus hardly pressed, and still condemned to fight with shadows, Sydney took a new tack of defence, by assailing the credit of the solitary witness which *had* appeared. He exposed his inconsistencies, his rhetorical artifice, his confused evidence, which distinguished what no man said or did, but created a general impression which might be distributed at any man's fancy. Jeffreys pretended to encourage him in this proceeding; he termed it relevant to attack the credit of a witness, if he could.

"I have this to say concerning my Lord Howard," continued Sydney, "he hath accused himself of divers treasons, and I do not hear that he has his pardon for any; he is under the terror of those treasons, and the punishment for them: he hath shown himself to be under that terror: he hath said he could not get his pardon until he had done some other jobs—till he was past that drudgery of swearing;—that is, my lord, that having incurred the penalty of high treason, he would get his own indemnity by destroying others. This, by the law

of God and man, I think, destroys a man's testimony. Besides, my lord, he is my debtor; he owes me a considerable sum of money I lent him in time of his great necessity; he made some covenants with me for the payment of that money, which he hath broken; and when his mortgage was forfeited, and I might take the advantage the law gives me, he found out a way to have me laid up in the Tower. He is a very subtle man; at my Lord Russell's trial he carried his knife, he said, between the paring and the apple; and so this is a point of great nicety and cunning, at one time to get his own pardon, and at the same time to save his money. Another thing, my lord, is, that when I was a prisoner, he came to my house, and spoke with my servant, and said, how sorry he was that I should be brought in danger upon this account of the plot, and that it was but a sham; and that he was confident, if I had known any thing, I should have told him. He hath said something of this before; I have several witnesses to prove both. He was desirous to go farther, and he would not only pay my debt by his testimony against me, but he would have got my plate and other goods from me into his possession, and he desired my man, as a place of trust, to put them in his hands. And the next news was that there was a warrant against my Lord Russell and me. But then, my lord, he made other affirmations in the presence of God, that I was innocent in his opinion, and was confident of it; for if I had known any thing of it, I would have told it."

After this burst of indignant feeling, Sydney looked

again at his legal notes, and apparently resumed the line of argument which they chalked out for him. All the ingenious resources of defence were exhausted by the able lawyers who had drawn up his plea; every argument of reason, authority, and even ridicule, charged in succession the mass of disorderly unconnected facts and perjuries which Howard had produced. The decisions of former judges, refusing the similitude of hands, seemed to destroy the evidence of the alleged libel. Sydney, however, got into speaking of Filmer's work, which his own was written to refute, and the zeal of the author soon appeared in the withering invective which he launched at his adversary. But Jeffreys recalled him abruptly, and, after some wrangling, impatiently desired him to produce his witnesses, if he had any.

Sydney, finding it in vain to contend with the power and obstinacy of his judge, called the Earl of Anglesey, who bore testimony to the expressions which Howard had used, relative to Sydney's innocence of the plot. The Earl of Clare bore a similar evidence, commenting with great bitterness on the delator's ingratitude to a man who had obliged him in many instances. Mr. Philip Howard, a gentleman of the same family as the accuser, also witnessed against him, and with the indignation of an honourable mind, indignant at the disgrace brought on their common name. The celebrated Burnet; Sydney's steward, Ducas; the Lord Paget; Mr. Edward Howard; and several witnesses of inferior rank were called, who testified to the facts of the Lord

Howard's constant denial of the conspiracy, his assertions of Sydney's innocence, and frequent expressions of complaint at being obliged to purchase his own pardon at the sacrifice of others. There was no necessity to prove the mortgage—he hastily acknowledged that himself.

Sydney's counsel now produced a witness, in the form of an old grisly Jew, whom several in court instantly recognized as the alchemist, Elkanah.

"And what have you to say, my fine master?" said Jeffreys, watching the snaky glittering of the man's eye, with the interest of a congenial nature.

"This only have I to say," replied the Jew, tremulously, "that if your lordship pleases to show me any of these sheets of paper, I will undertake to imitate them in a little time, that you shall not know which is which. 'Tis the easiest hand that ever I saw in my life."

"You did not write these, Elkanah?" said Sir Robert, tossing over the papers impatiently.

"No; but I will do so in a very little time, if you pleash," replied the alchemist.

"Have you any more witnesses?" interrupted Jeffreys, in a wrathful voice.

"No, my lord."

"Then address yourself to the jury," he replied, vehemently.

And Sydney did address himself to the jury, with the same calmness and dignity of manner which he had preserved throughout the trial. His speech was a model

the crusher's hand. He summed up the evidence altogether against Sydney and his witnesses, and drew from those of his antagonists a narrative of the plot, to which he seemed to pledge the weight of his judicial authority.

All the arguments in Sydney's favour, one by one, disappeared under the crushing march of his (so called) *judge!* But as if aware of the instability of his decision concerning witnesses, the chief justice, after reiterating it, declared that, even if the prisoner's objection was good,—there were two witnesses, one indeed dumb, yet speaking with a mighty voice—being pen and ink. There was a general murmur of curiosity; but when the judge pronounced that this second witness was the book which Sydney had written, a book containing "all the malice, and revenge, and treason, that mankind can be guilty of," men looked at each other in mute terror. He reminded the courtly jury of the bitter times of the late rebellion, and declared that without vigour and unanimity similar scenes were approaching. "Next, I must tell you, gentlemen," he concluded this part of his summary with bloodthirsty injustice, "upon, I think, a less testimony, an indictment was preferred against the late Lord Russell, and he was thereupon convicted and executed: of which the record has been brought. This is the evidence for the king."

He next proceeded to demolish Sydney's various objections. The fabric which his lawyer's skill had raised, rapidly fell, brick by brick, beneath the overbearing hand of his authority. "So that on one side,"

he concluded, piously raising his eye, a trick he had learned from his old masters, the puritans, "God forbid but we should be careful of men's lives; so on the other side, God forbid that flourishes and varnish should come to endanger the life of the king, and the destruction of the government. But, gentlemen, we are not to anticipate you in matters of fact. I have, according to my memory, recapitulated the matter given in evidence. It remains purely in you now, to say whether you believe, upon the whole matter, that the prisoner is guilty of the high treason whereof he is indicted."

"Gentlemen, it is fit you have our opinion," said Mr. Justice Withins, unwilling to be defrauded of his share of everlasting infamy. "In all the points of law we concur with my lord chief-justice: Colonel Sydney says, here is a mighty conspiracy, but there is nothing comes of it: who must we thank for that? None but the Almighty Providence: one of themselves being troubled in conscience, and came to discover it; had not Keeling discovered it, God knows whether we might have been alive at this day."

After this appeal, *ad homines*, the jury withdrew. "And now, my dearest child, for the firmness which you promised me," said Sydney, turning to his daughter, "Remember you are a Sydney!"

She looked at him, and her white lips moved, but uttered no sound. Sydney stooped and kissed her marble brow, with dignified tenderness. He then began speaking in an under tone, but with perfect calm-

the crusher's hand. He summed up the evidence altogether against Sydney and his witnesses, and drew from those of his antagonists a narrative of the plot, to which he seemed to pledge the weight of his judicial authority.

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She looked at him, and her white lips moved, but uttered no sound. Sydney stooped and kissed her marble brow, with dignified tenderness. He then began speaking in an under tone, but with perfect calm-

ness, to his counsel and the gentlemen of his acquaintance who crowded round. Mervyn, who had hitherto looked on as imperturbable as a statue, now observed the strange lawyer whisper to Jeffreys, who, under pretext of taking some refreshment, retired. He returned in a few minutes, something flushed, probably with a draught of strong waters, his favourite potation, and observed in a mild tone,

"The jury are like to occupy the best part of an hour in their talk, so, master sergeant, make some small room at the bar, and let us see this rare witness of ours, who hath so amply testified against himself. Let another twelve be sworn, and we will despatch his business."

The orders of Jeffreys were always obeyed with rapidity. A new jury soon occupied the box of those in debate, and Mervyn's guards transferred him to the bar, at which sat Sydney and his daughter. The former embraced him with extreme emotion; the latter put her hand mechanically in his, and a visible shudder ran over her whole frame. Mervyn blessed God that she seemed scarcely sensible of what was going on, and took his stand, leaning on the bar with proud and dignified composure.

"Prisoner!" said Jeffreys, in a terrific tone, "you stand indicted of high treason, and your plea of guilty is recorded; but, for the satisfaction of the jury, let it be read again."

"You may spare yourself that trouble, my lord," said Mervyn, "as also any attempt to frighten me with big

looks and noisy words. I am past fear, my lord. I plead guilty to your indictment, for in that guilt, as you call it, do I place my chief hopes of being remembered with applause in my country's history. I am guilty of conspiring to dethrone the tyrant, Charles II., and to restore their liberty to the English people."

"Read his confession, clerk," said Jeffreys, with imperturbable determination.

While this form was going through, Mervyn felt his sleeve plucked from behind, and looking round, he saw with surprise and horror the form of Colonel Blood, half hidden by a pillar. He looked as pale as a corpse, but his eyes had a wild wolf-like glare.

"Mervyn!" he whispered, "there is still another die in the box—demand the ordeal by battle; 'tis an ancient law unrepealed!"

Mervyn turned as if from a fiend, but the words worked strangely in his mind, and assimilated well with the reckless state of his feelings. When, therefore, Jeffreys hurriedly began to pronounce sentence on him, for Sydney's jury were now ready with their verdict, he interrupted him. "My lord, I have this to say why judgment should not be passed on me," he exclaimed. "By an ancient law, never repealed, it is left to the accused to vindicate themselves in single battle against their accusers. Your lordship is fond of these ancient worm-eaten laws, and will not deny me battle with my accuser, whoever he may be, which I now demand to the death, as witness my glove!"

"Then fight it out with yourself, for you are your

own sole accuser!" said Jeffreys, with a loud laugh, in which none joined. "Why, the man is mad—let us see him buffet himself—light, light!"

A few torches hastily kindled threw a dark and lugubrious illumination on the scene, and produced an effect of peculiar solemnity and gloom. The pale face of Mervyn glaring with passion; the passive form of Aurora, with her marble features bathed in a cold dew; the calm majestic attitude of Sydney; the immense masses of gazing faces, which had all gradually sunk into dark twilight; all came suddenly into full relief. Jeffreys renewed his sentencing, when he suddenly recollected that he had not his black cap on, and he turned with a sharp rebuke to the officer who ought to have had it ready—when a muttering murmur ran around "*the* jury, *the* jury!" In an instant there was a profound silence throughout the hall. The jury appeared, with their foreman at the head, preceded by an officer with links. But this illumination was rendered unnecessary by a cataract of rich golden light, which inundated the whole hall, and lighted up its minutest carving—probably a sudden burst out of the cloudy sunset.

"Well, gentlemen, well, what is your verdict?" exclaimed the chief justice. There was a general leaning forward in the audience, and suppressed exclamations in female tones.

"My lord, we find the prisoner—Guilty," replied the foreman, in a tremulous tone.

There was a moment of deathly silence; not a word,

not a movement, not a breath, throughout the immense mass. Then, as if released from the wand of some enchanter, a general murmur was heard; some looked at Sydney, and a smile seemed to quiver on his lips; others at Aurora, and she seemed in no wise disturbed from her trance of agony, save that the tears were flowing unheeded down her white cheeks.

"Speak up like men then—the prisoner is guilty!" said Jeffreys, with a look of savage triumph. "Mr. Attorney, will you move any thing?"

"My lord, the prisoner at the bar is convicted of high treason," said Sir Robert. "I demand judgment against him."

"Algernon Sydney, hold up thy hand," said the clerk of the court. Sydney obeyed. And the usual question was put if he had any thing to say why judgment of death should not be passed against him.

"My lord, I humbly conceive I have had no trial," said Sydney. "I was to be tried by my country; I did not find my country in the jury that tried me; there were some of them that were not freeholders. I think, my lord, there is neither law nor precedent of any man that has been tried upon an indictment by a jury who were not entirely composed of freeholders. Thus, I humbly conceive, that I have had no trial at all, and, if I have had no trial, there can be no judgment."

Jeffreys abruptly overruled this objection, and another which Sydney's counsel put into his hand, relating to the omission of one of the king's titles in the indictment. Many more arguments he produced, as if in the

vain hope of exhausting the injustice of his judge, who at length proceeded in a bullying manner to pass sentence. But Sydney again interrupted him.

"I must appeal to God and the world!" exclaimed he, "I am not heard."

"Appeal to whom you will," replied the chief justice. "I could wish, with all my heart, instead of appealing to the world, as though you had received something extremely hard in your case, that you would appeal to the great God of Heaven, and consider the guilt you have contracted by the great offence you have committed. I could wish, that, as a gentleman and a Christian, you would consider, under what particular obligations you lie to that gracious king who hath done so much for you. I should have thought it would have wrought in you such a temper of mind, as to have turned the rest of your life into a generous acknowledgment of his bounty and mercy. Mr. Sydney, you are a gentleman of quality, and need no counsel from me: if I could give you any, my charity to your immortal soul would provoke me to it. I pray God season this affliction to you. There remains nothing with the court, but to pronounce that judgment which is expected, and the law requires: therefore, the judgment of the court is—*That you be carried hence*——"

"My lord, it is a beastly and an abominable formula!" interrupted Sydney. "Pray you, let my daughter retire—ah, God, she is dead!"

This exclamation he uttered when turning round he saw his daughter supported by Mervyn in her chair,

her head lying back, her eyes closed, and her whole appearance calm as death.

"No, 'tis only a swoon—would to God she were dead!" groaned Mervyn.

"Remove her, and let her be looked after," said Jeffreys. "I am sorry for the lady; there are those waiting without who have the care of her."

Sydney raised his senseless child in his arms, and for a moment nature overcame the heroic stoicism of his manner. His countenance grew convulsed with emotion, and a single choked sob burst from his heart as he resigned her powerless weight to Lady Howard's woman, who now appeared. Her uncle, the Earl of Leicester, and several other gentlemen, assisted in bearing her out, and then the unmoved Jeffreys pronounced the barbarous sentence of the law. He threw in, as if by make-weight, Mervyn's sentence—but it was *to be hanged only.* "And the God of infinite mercy have mercy on your souls!" he charitably concluded.

"Then, O God! O God!" exclaimed Sydney, "I beseech thee to sanctify these sufferings unto us, and impute not our blood to the country, nor the city, through which we are to be drawn; let no inquisition be made for it: but if any, and the shedding of blood which is innocent, must be revenged, let the weight of it fall only upon those, that maliciously prosecute us, for righteousness' sake!"

"I pray God work in you a temper fit to go into the other world," said Jeffreys, "for I see you are not fit for this."

"My lord, feel my pulse, and see if I am disordered," said Sydney, extending his hand. "I bless God, I never was in better temper than I am now."

"I demand my sentence according to the statute!" exclaimed Mervyn, wildly. "I will not be hanged!"

"Is not that good enough for your gentility?" said Jeffreys with a bitter sneer. "Remove the prisoners—we are done!"

"My lord, I have one request to make," said Sydney. "It is, that my daughter be given to the guardianship of her uncle. I cannot suffer her in the inhuman hands of my enemies."

"There is matter against her before the council—she is better in the hands of Lady Howard than the dungeons of the Tower!" said Jeffreys, rising impatiently.

"Farewell then, dear and worthy son!" said Sydney, embracing Mervyn. "Farewell!—if we meet again on earth it must be on the scaffold, but I doubt not in a brief space we shall be together in a better place."

"The scaffold then be our field of glory, father!" said Mervyn. "I have followed your steps on earth, and I shall follow them to Heaven!"

They embraced once more with solemn tenderness, and the guards removed them in different directions.

CHAPTER XV.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

It was the morning following the eventful day we have just described, when a figure enveloped in a long cloak, was seen gliding in at the portals of Aumerle House, in which but few now entered. He mounted the stairs, pushing the page aside who would have announced him, and made his way into the apartment we have formerly described. Things had reassumed their usual orderly magnificence; a bright fire blazed in the chimney, and near it sat Lady Howard in her wonted state. She had some gold network in her hand, but had forgotten to ply it, and seemed buried in a dark revery.

"Well, is it you, Mr. Blood?" she said, carelessly turning at the sound of footsteps.

"It is, madam," replied the muffled figure.

"You seem in bad spirits, colonel," said the countess. "What ails you? Lack you gold? There—help yourself—here are my keys, and there are my coffers."

"I come not for gold—I have perchance what will serve my time," replied Blood, in a croaking voice. "This wound in my side, given by the hand of the heir of Aumerle, is deadly. I want what is better than all the mines of Mexico—a moment's peace of mind! Woman, you have broken our compact!—he dies, and by your means."

"Well, he dies," said the countess, calmly.

"But he shall not die!—I will proclaim you rather!" exclaimed Blood.

"Do your worst, colonel—I defy you!" she replied, mockingly.

"Fatal woman! you have snapped the last links of my chain," said Blood, violently.

"You have too long held me the slave of your threats, sir," said the countess. "They pall upon me now, and lack the taste of terror. Do your worst, Master Blood—I tell you, I defy you."

"'Tis well then!" said the colonel, clenching his teeth as if in resolute purpose. "Madam, I bear the king's commands to speak with Mistress Sydney."

"To what intent?" said the countess. "But I deny you not; she is the king's prisoner, not mine. I marvel you have not yet noted her—she is there."

She waved her hand at a figure reclining on a couch, in a recess of a window, but so motionless that Blood

had not perceived it. It was Aurora; she was as pale as snow, her eyes sunk and closed, while tears streamed as if unconsciously down her cheeks.

"Lady," said Blood in a mild tone, "dry your tears; a better day has dawned: I bring you good news."

"You bring then word that I am to die with them!" she said with wild eagerness.

"You shall all live—all be happy yet!" said Blood. "It depends on yourself, lady, whether they live or die like slaughtered oxen under the bloody axe! Read this letter—it will explain all—it is from the king."

"The king!" she exclaimed vacantly, and mechanically taking the paper. "Alack, mine eyes are all on fire, or else the writing burns. 'Tis so—Charles R.!"

She seemed to reanimate from her stupor of grief, and began reading, but the contents appeared to puzzle her. She apparently read them over and over again; at length, however, the meaning seemed to burst upon her, and she covered her face in an agony of tears and sobs.

"Weep, weep, lady! tears relieve the overcharged heart," said Blood. "Would to God that I could weep too! His majesty is touched with pity for your sufferings, but on no other conditions will he brave the fury of his brother, and the discontent of the cavaliers."

"My father's life spared—only to be confined in the Tower—a pardon to be granted in a year!" said Aurora, in a tone of amazed incredulity. "Mervyn pardoned on the instant—his birth acknowledged—ostensibly

married to me—and all the price of one poor wretch's shame. Oh, what a value hath villany in this world! and virtue none!"

"Believe it not, Mistress Sydney!" said Lady Howard. "York will never consent to any of the exclusion men being spared: your father will be beheaded at last like Raleigh, or murdered in his dungeon like—"

"Like your husband, Aumerle," interrupted Aurora, with a flash of her former spirit. "But 'tis all in vain. Oh, Colonel Blood, my father would never live at such a ransom—Mervyn would detest, loathe me—I cannot, I will not! I will die with them—my heart will not take long breaking."

"You give them then to the block!" exclaimed Blood. "Think, lady, think of your father's gray hairs! think you see them bathed and clotted in his gore! think you hear the whirr of the axe as it severs that neck round which you have so often clung! He hath been both father and mother to you; she who should have shared his task died young, yet you have never missed a mother's love. Think ere it be too late! Oh! it will madden you when you gaze on his bloody hacked corpse to think that a word, a single word, might have saved him!"

"I cannot—I cannot—what must I do?" gasped Aurora. "Cannot the king content him with my life? I will gladly die by any tormenting death—but must I die of shame?"

"Beware, Aurora Sydney! put no faith in Charles's

promises!" said Lady Howard, vehemently. "He hath deceived all men, and broken all pledges—he will dishonour you, and murder your father too!"

"'Tis false!" exclaimed Blood. "Do but consent, and in an hour I will bring you Mervyn's pardon;—promise only to—to go to-morrow and present a petition at Whitehall for your father's life, and not alone shall it be granted on the instant, but you are thenceforth omnipotent in England."

"Let him pardon my father first, Mervyn and I can die together," she exclaimed, wildly.

"And therefore the king will not do so," said Blood.

"What shall I do? My God, my God!" shrieked Aurora, wildly pressing her brows. "I am maddening; would that I were mad as the veriest Bedlamite."

"Write but two words—say you consent."

"Could I but see my father—could I but know that he will live at such a price," said she, distractedly. "Oh, do but let me see him; but he would rather die a million million deaths."

"Ay, rather the perpetual death of Prometheus!" said Lady Howard.

"Oh, countess, countess, have mercy!" said Aurora, "I cannot have my father butchered. Oh, he did love me so! I must not, I will not! If it be a crime, Heaven will forgive it sooner than the selfish virtue which would give them both to the block."

"Live then, a mark for shame to point at through all ages!" shouted the countess.

"It well becomes thee, thou pure wife and tender

mother, to threaten this!" said Blood, with slow bitterness.

"Tigress! thou hast never known what human feelings are, or thou couldst not!" said Aurora, with a sudden and strange brilliancy kindling in her eye. "If I were but sure that the king meant truth by me—bring me this pardon, and I will consent."

"Joy, joy! I will soon bring you good news, dearest lady!" said Blood, as he rushed out of the room.

In truth a few hours only elapsed ere the colonel made his reappearance, though the rapid night of an English November was darkening all things as he entered the mansion. He found Aurora alone in the same apartment, in almost the same attitude, save that she was now perfectly tearless with long weeping.

"Victory! victory!" he exclaimed. "Here is Mervyn's pardon, an order for his release, an acknowledgment of his birth, dated only two days forward, on that which should be his day of execution!"

"Can this be true! Lady Howard has been out ever since you left me, and treachery is doubtless at work," said Aurora.

"Let her do her worst!" exclaimed Blood, "be at Whitehall to-morrow at noonday, and you are empress of all England!"

Aurora laughed—a bitter, wild, jangling laugh, which made Blood shudder and stare at her with much alarm.

"Nay, it is all well, excellently well," she said, hurriedly, "but I must needs laugh to think! I must save

my father, you know. The king shall sign his pardon, ay, and set him as free as a wood-thrush, ere he poisons my lips with one breath of his! yet he cannot think I mean to play him false if I put myself wholly in his power, eh, Blood? and shall I not be so—unless *death* come to the rescue?"

"It is true, lady!" replied Blood, "but at least I have redeemed my soul, by saving the heir of the man whom—"

"But, Blood, I must be calm; my brain leaps with agony," said Aurora, pressing her hands to her brows. "They tell me that one Elkanah, a mediciner in the Mall, deals in a marvellous drug to calm the raging blood of madness. Here is a physician's rescript; get me this drug, in the name of mercy! Here is gold for him—a purse—let him pay himself."

Blood took the paper, and saw, with a surprise which he had some difficulty in concealing, that it was directed to his old friend, the alchemist. He promised obedience, however, with a readiness which might at any other time have excited her suspicions, but, in the present perturbed state of her mind, Aurora took no heed. She fell into a kind of sleepiness and stupor of grief, which Blood thought it best not to disturb, and accordingly took his departure, and proceeded immediately to Elkanah, induced as well by curiosity as the intense pain which he felt in his still green wound; the Jew, as usual, being his mediciner.

Blood threaded his way through the by-streets which led to Elkanah's shop, and with the familiarity of old

acquaintance, entered the chemist's sanctum unannounced. He was surprised and somewhat startled to find the old man engaged in sharpening the edge of a bright dagger, which seemed fastened by a spring to a richly-mounted pistol. Elkanah started up with an air of guilty confusion as he heard the step, and looked at Blood, with the weapon quivering in his hand, for some moments ere he felt assured who it was.

"Well, Elkanah, what do you there?" said Blood, taking the dagger in his hand, and suddenly starting as if his hand were stung.

"But polishing this quaint Italian weapon for a young cavalier of the court—any thing for money!" said the apothecary, confusedly.

"Then it hath been stolen, or else it is the exactest counterpart that ever was," said Blood.

"Stolen!—whence?"

"From the Tower," replied the colonel, and Elkanah's swarthy countenance grew of a leaden colour.

"There hath been no great encouragement to robberies in the Tower, colonel," he replied tartly.

"We will not quarrel about that matter, Elkanah," replied Blood. "Here—I have brought you fuel for your furnace—gold, man, gold! Doth the fool, Bethel, bleed as freely as ever?"

"Alack no, he is on the verge of bankruptcy and madness—the ungrateful beast!" replied Elkanah, with a sudden brightness of enthusiasm overspreading his sallow face. "And yet, colonel, would you think it? I am on the very verge of the great projection—smile

as you will—I swear 'tis true! I lack but one poor thousand pounds to buy a diamond of a peculiar carat, and the projection is complete, and I shall live for ever. But what am I to do for these moidores?"

"Give me this drug," said the colonel, handing the paper given him by Aurora.

The apothecary perused it with an air of indifference, and proceeded to rummage in a cabinet of carefully-locked drugs for the one in question.

"And whom are you weary of, colonel?" he said jocosely, as he adjusted his scales, "that you intend to give them so deadly a pinch of ease?"

"Deadly?" repeated Blood.

"Marry, call you not arsenic a good poison, and so refined that but to breathe it were death to an ox?" said the apothecary.

"Is it so?" said Blood, with assumed indifference. "Well, I want not so deadly a dust; give me some of your precious anodynes—some sleepy essence that shall counterfeit death, or at least bring repose to the throbbing brain of madness. Canst not?"

"Certes," replied the apothecary. "Here is a drug which shall make a man sleep while you run a skewer down his marrow—ha, ha!—it shall seem death for good twelve hours—not long enough to bury a man alive, if such be thy intent?"

"It will do," replied Blood. "And now tent my wound, Elkanah; it gnaws like the undying worm. Thy pharmacy hath hitherto but heightened the smart."

A ghastly smile overspread the Hebrew's face.

"Look that thou dost not play me false, Jew!" said Blood, observing this with some undefined suspicion stealing into his mind.

Elkanah giggled again hysterically, and proceeded to dress the wound, the mouth of which welled out a dark green fluid. With a man of Blood's impatience this was soon performed, the drug carefully folded, and once more he was in the open air. He left the parcel at Aumerle House, and then resolved to go to Newgate, to relieve Mervyn from the agonizing apprehensions which he conceived must weigh upon his mind.

He knocked, and a turnkey readily admitted him; but in answer to his request, he was informed that the prisoner was taken to the Tower, by a warrant of the council, about an hour before! Blood looked at the man for some minutes incredulously, and a variety of circumstances rushed into his mind, which excited a strange and diabolical suspicion.

"Know you to what part of the fortress he was taken?" he said.

"Yes, very well, by the same token that it was the 'partment in which Lord Aumerle shot himself, as I remember; for I was a serving-man there once—the Bloody Tower, they call it," replied the jailer.

"The Bloody Tower!" repeated the colonel. "Then I have no time to lose."

He rushed out of the precincts of Newgate, called a hackney-coach, and drove rapidly to the Tower. The gates were, however, closed, the drawbridge raised, and

the only reply which Blood could get to his earnest entreaties to see the lieutenant, was an order to come the next morning. Breathing vengeance and fury, Blood at last retired to a neighbouring alehouse, to ruminate on what was to be feared, and what was to be done.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BLOODY TOWER.

THE excitement and agony of his trial once over, Mervyn relapsed into that state of quiet desperation which is usually remarked in men of his ardent character, when the storm of passions is over. He expected the tidings of death with little emotion, and it was only when his thoughts reverted to Aurora, and the deplorable state in which she would be left, that they regained the venom of their sting. But it was not without some surprise that he learned he was to be taken to the Tower, for greater security till the execution, especially as it was late in the evening when the order arrived. But it was obeyed instantly, and he was taken in a coach to St. Katharine's gate, where he was received by the lieutenant of the Tower, and escorted to his apartments with great civility.

It was not without some degree of melancholy surprise, that Mervyn found they were leading him up the stairs of the Bloody Tower. Sir John probably understood the expression of his prisoner's countenance, as he apologized for the intended accommodation, by alleging that he had received express orders, which he dared not disobey, to lodge him in that particular suite.

"It matters little where I lodge for the remainder of my life, Sir John," replied Mervyn.

"I am sorry to agree with you, sir," replied the lieutenant, apparently pleased with his prisoner's submission. "I have ordered every arrangement likely to diminish your discomforts, as good fires and good wine, and good old Mr. Edwards will be your seneschal."

So saying, he motioned to a very old man, with long white hair, and much bowed by years, who stood at the top of the stairs. Mervyn immediately recognised the keeper of the regalia. The old man bowed reverently, and threw his torchlight forward, to light him up the murky staircase.

Mervyn soon found himself in the state-chamber, whose gloomy vastness was lighted, or rather darkened, by a single lamp. The high-barred window showed a square patch of starry sky, and faintly illumined the tapestry on the walls, and crossing the yellow lamplight, gave a peculiarly ghastly glare to the figures on it. Some signs of comfort, however, redeemed the general gloom and musty neglect of the apartment: a table was spread handsomely with silver plate, and two or three kinds of wine in tankards; and a bright wood-fire blazed

in the chimney, without dissipating the musty smell and dank atmosphere of the long-disused chambers.

Mervyn walked up and down, restless as a panther first turned into its cage, while the other two were busied in the bedroom, lighting another fire, and shaking up the huge couch; and he marked with a moment's attention the river view visible from the bedroom window, until by degrees he grew more calm.

"Do you remember me, Master Edwards?" he said, observing that the old man, on his return into the chamber, looked at him very earnestly.

"Marry, no, sir," replied Edwards; "but it set me on thinking, seeing how like you look to the great man that slept here last—many a year agone—the great catholic earl, Aumerle."

"How long ago is it?" said Mervyn.

"A matter of some twenty years, if my old memory tallies," replied Edwards. "He murdered himself in that bed—though I should not tell your honour so—I could show the very weapon. Where is it, Andrew?—Oh, Master Chiffinch took it away when he was last here, for his majesty's curiosities."

"I have seen the day you would not have allowed that the earl did that dismal deed himself, Master Edwards," said Mervyn, with strong emotion.

"Indeed!" said Edwards, with much curiosity.—"Your honour will excuse my boldness, but I can't help thinking you are the man of the boy that came here with Blood when he tried to steal the crown."

"You are right—I was to have been your daughter-in-law," said Mervyn, with a melancholy smile.

"Well, sir, you saved my life then; I would I could do so by yours now," replied the old man.

"An angel could scarce do that," said Mervyn, looking round with a slight shudder. "But why, I marvel, have they put me here?—were there no other chambers in which to stow me, Edwards, till I fill my narrow one? These chambers have a desolate aspect; but your fire makes it look more cheerful. Is it much as the earl left it?"

"Scarce a chair out of place," said the old man, thoughtfully. "The silver crucifix is gone indeed, but that is his desk where he sat writing the night of his death. The bedroom, too, is just the same. The velvet belonged to him, I think—ay, indeed, it has his coronet upon it—poor gentleman!"

"Do you recollect the night of the mur— suicide?" said Mervyn.

"Ay, well enough, and the beautiful little boy that Claude Duval brought to see him," said Edwards. "And the quarrel with that beast, Blood—the blow! —Oh, I can recollect things a score years ago, though I forget those of yesterday."

"I was that child, Edwards," said Mervyn, musing as if in a deeper stratum of memory. "And it seems to me as if I recollected something of a tall pale man, with a noble countenance, dressed in black. But had he a bunch of poppies on his breast?"

"A bunch of poppies!" repeated Edwards, with an

aghast look. "When he was dead it might seem so? Well, God forgive us all—yet blood that is fairly shed, will wash out," continued the superstitious old man. "But yonder is my lord's, as crimson in the boards to this day as it is in the soul of his murderer!"

"But I at least shall die on the scaffold, in the fair daylight—and in a glorious cause!" said Mervyn, earnestly interrupting the garrulous old man.

"We are the king's officers and must not hear you say so," said the old keeper, with a smile. "But I hear you are to be hanged, sir, and 'tis a pity, if you come of such good blood."

"They will not even let me die like a gentleman," said Mervyn, bitterly.

"Heaven forbid I should put such thoughts in your head, but this place is enough to drive any man—to cheat the hangman," said Edwards, significantly. "I was thinking too of poor Claude Duval, who is to swing to-morrow at Tyburn, for doing on the highway what honest men do in their closets."

"Is Claude Duval then taken!" exclaimed Mervyn.

"Why, sir, he was taken with you!" said Edwards, much surprised.

"Indeed, indeed! I had forgotten," said Mervyn, musingly. "But what's this you say about murders? —No matter. What is under these covers? Come, you shall stay and sup with me."

"I have orders to attend you, sir, on account of the knives," said Edwards, quite seriously.

"Well, there is enough for us all," said Mervyn. "I am a good republican, or death will soon make me one: so remove the covers, gentlemen, and draw chairs."

Edwards declined, however, in the most positive terms, alleging it was against all regulations; but he sat down at the prisoner's earnest request, and the warders stood behind his chair while he ate.

At length Mervyn was left alone, and he listened with a heavy heart to the doors swinging on their hinges, and the bolts rolling into their sockets. Albeit seated at a cheerful fire, with a tankard of claret at hand, his meditations were not likely to be of an exhilarating character. A prisoner, under sentence of death, it seemed as if he could now take a survey of the events of his life, and pass sentence with the impartiality of an historian. Recollection called up recollection, and as if in a panorama, the scenes of his short but eventful career, passed in review before his imagination. He thought of all that he was, and contrasted it painfully with all that he might have been! But for the crimes of a few individuals how happily he might have lived! From his cradle prosperity would have waited upon him, distinction courted him, honour rewarded his least effort. The exquisite being whom his soul worshipped even in its desolation, would have been his, amidst all the enjoyments of wealth, and power, and grandeur. Then arose the terrific contrast. His scorned youth, his dangerous manhood, his lost love, his approaching death of terrible agony, and still more

terrible ignominy. It was the first time he had imaged Death in his full and ghastly actuality; hitherto he had thought of it only in the distance, as a chance that might happen—a sudden and a glorious blow. But to be hanged, throttled, suffocated—the idea was too horrible!

He felt his neck, he pressed it—he tried to imagine the sensation—it was agonizing. He recollected Godfrey's death-look, and from murder to murder, he bethought him of his father's dismal end in that very chamber. Then he reasoned whether or not it was a suicide; he sipped his claret deliberately, and weighed the motives which might have determined his father to the act. Somehow or another all these arguments, as he shaped them, seemed to have equal intensity *with regard to himself.* He asked himself, why should a man fear to anticipate his doom by a few short hours?—but then was it not a crime? Certainly not like that of a man who has his volition in full play! Then he thought that Aurora would know that he had died by the hangman—and he looked around, not as one who has formed a resolution, but as one who seeks reasons to form it.

He looked at the fire burning dully down into its white ashes—but humanity shrunk back appalled from the terrible idea which crossed him, that death lurked even in those glowing embers. Then his eye fell musingly on the huge iron bars of the window, and he recollected to have heard of a man who hung himself in Newgate at a similar place—and that was only to escape standing in the pillory. But again the ghastly

face of Godfrey seemed to glare at him, and he tried to recollect some other mode of suicide less terrible. Still it was all vague—merely speculation.

He now thought of the Earl of Essex, and of the weapon he used—but there was none such at hand; and then his thoughts reverted to his unhappy father. It chanced that the moonlight streamed at the moment through the barred window on the desk, and by some wonderful freak of association, the whole scene arose almost palpably to the eye of sense. He distinctly remembered the features and dress of his father, his jewels of the garter, his fine eyes, the melancholy sweetness of his smile. He sat for some time lost in this revery, and a superstitious ague began to creep over him. His hair hung heavy with drops of agitation; in vain he sipped the wine, stirred the fire, and endeavoured to reason on the folly of his fears. Why should he dread a species of being which he was soon to pass into himself? Was not he too a spirit, of an immortal essence, though cased in material clay? Then he fell to reasoning on death.

What was it, this death? Was it a sleep? merely the absence, not the privation, of all the powers and senses called life? What kind of passage must the thinking particle pass through, whatever it might be, ere it stood naked of its clay! The brain, the eyes bursting in suffocation—what then succeeded? Again he held his neck till his eyes filled with sparks, and the veins of his head panted; insensibility must soon ensue if the sensation had been continued: what then? Would

the thinking atom survive that crush and inundation of agonies, or would it become again the nothing that it was?

A thousand different speculations which he had heard in the course of his diversified career, now occurred to him. The subtilties of the schools; the acute, logical, yet unconvincing theology of the Jesuits; the lively atheism of the courtiers of Charles II.—all seemed to lose power and meaning in the actual presence of the great Œdipus—Death. But could he not put the great question now, and force an answer? And then so strangely did imagination work, he almost envied his father, his dagger—pistol—so rapid and so sure. He endeavoured to shape out the earl's tragedy, and followed him step by step, by a train of almost mathematical deductions, in the work of blood and death. Suddenly he felt an irresistible desire to go into the bedchamber where he had breathed his last. He took the light and walked towards the door, but as he approached its threshold, a slight sound, it may be an imaginary one, caused him to look shudderingly back, and his eye fell upon a large mirror opposite, and so ghastly pale and like what he remembered of the earl, was his own image there, that he stood for a moment horror-struck, as if he beheld a phantom. Then he smiled dismally at his own terrors, and after hesitating another moment at the fatal door, entered.

The appearance of the bedchamber was not such as to dispel the visions which haunted him. A low fire burned in the huge chimney, and shed a dark glare on

the red damask curtains, the faded tapestry, and naked floor. He placed the candle down, and seated himself in an arm-chair near the fire, that he might deliberately comprehend his own feelings in regard to his actual situation. A vague idea of escape suddenly crossed his mind, as he looked at the vast chimney; he glanced up; there was a hole scarcely wider than a quart bottle in the vast stones of the masonry. His eye reverted in despair, and fell upon a broad stain in the floor, and as if fascinated, he followed its least meander, to a distance of several yards from the bed. "Oh, my father, my father!" he exclaimed aloud. "Thou who didst prefer death to dishonour—shall the last of thine ancient blood die by the hangman?"

As he spoke his gaze was attracted by the glitter of a silver tag which, according to the fashion of the day, fastened his doublet, and the thought occurred to him that by its instrumentality he might baffle the vengeance of the tyrant—that, like the victims of the Roman Neros, he might open his veins, and quietly bleed to death. This idea fascinated him, and his resolve was instantly matured. He took a strange pleasure in the thought that he would go to the very spot where his unhappy father had perished, and there like him elude the fangs of his enemies. He arose, took the tag from his breast, and having ascertained that the point readily pierced the skin of his hand, he went towards the bed. But suddenly a form met his eye—whether the offspring of delirious fancy, or one of those inexplicable and tremendous phenomena which cross our mysterious being, and

are incapable of all rational solution while the secrets of death remain such—but the form of his father, exactly as he had last seen him, save for a grisly wound in his left side, stood there, before him! His garb was the same as he had seen it in life—black velvet glittering with jet ornaments—but his face was of the awful paleness of the tomb, and a mournful tenderness seemed to struggle with the rigidity of death.

The figure stood perfectly motionless between Mervyn and the couch, and as the prisoner gazed, his hair rose upright on his head, his teeth clenched, and his whole frame seemed paralyzed. In a few moments the figure grew indistinct, and finally waved into air. He seemed then to recover breathing and life, and staggered back to his chair.

A few moments' rally persuaded him that what he had seen was merely an illusion of his excited organs, and the dreadful longing after death again assailed him, like that which men feel to leap when gazing down a precipice. He rose again, and looked towards the couch which he destined for that of his eternal rest; but the form was there again, distinct, clear—and this time waving its hand earnestly away. Mervyn's resolve once more faded, and terror rendered him motionless; the tag dropped from his hand, the room seemed to whirl round, a million lights danced in his eyes, and he sunk insensible on the floor.

When he awoke from his trance his brain seemed shooting with the keenest darts of pain; and he had scarcely strength to lift himself up. He sat down in

his chair with a dreadful conviction that he was maddening, but the hope and desire of self-murder had vanished. He felt that if he could weep it would be an unspeakable relief, but not a drop came to his burning lids. He endeavoured to pray but he could not. His ideas rushed with marvellous confusion one over the other; his lamp was fast sinking in the socket, and it seemed as if his mind would sink with it. He bathed his parched lips with a little wine, and strove to recollect where he was, and what had happened; but it was in vain. A deep languor began to oppress him, but the only distinct idea which now remained was some indefinite horror of the bed. He remained, therefore, where he was in the arm-chair, and fell into a kind of half conscious doze.

An hour might have passed thus, when he became aware of a slight crackling sound in his ear, and starting with a sensation of universal cold, he looked around. The fire had burned into red embers, and though his own figure was lost in the black shadow of the chimney, the rest of the room was faintly illumined by a red reflection from the grate. He saw, he was certain he saw, the tapestry figure of Ahasuerus waver on his throne; it stirred with more violence, and the tapestry swelled out; then a head appeared at the bottom—the thick matted locks and beard of a man level with the floor—it paused for a moment, and then the face turned up as if to listen. The glare of the embers fell full upon it, and in the swarthy countenance and basilisk

eyes of that head, Mervyn recognised the features of Elkanah, the alchemist.

He now concluded that he was delirious, though he marvelled at having reason enough to know it, and looked on rather with a dreadful curiosity as to what frightful phantasmata his imagination was about to present, than any other feeling. A figure followed the head, sliding out like a serpent, and occasionally pausing to listen, until it lay at full length on the floor. Then gradually it raised itself upright, and seemed to wipe the dust from its face and eyes, shaking back its shaggy hair.

Mervyn looked on with what one might almost call philosophical curiosity, to see what his imagination would do with this extraordinary phantom, having evoked it. It proceeded in all its movements apparently with breathless caution, and though convinced that all he saw was an illusion, Mervyn shuddered at the expression of that diabolical countenance. The figure fumbled in its upper garments, and drew out a dagger—*the* dagger—his father's dagger. He marvelled at the coincidences of his disordered fancy, and remained absorbed in watching the illusion.

It listened, and as if satisfied with hearing no sound, moved towards the bed on tiptoe, paused a brief moment, drew the curtains slightly back, and raised its arm as if to strike where its spectator should have lain. But suddenly that arm was arrested by another—a hand which seemed to strike it with paralysis. The apothe-

cary uttered a slight shriek, and turned his horror-struck countenance! The fire lighted with a sudden glow that silent and terrific group—it was Blood and Elkanah.

Mervyn smiled at these strange phantasmagoria of his imagination; he thought that he could dismiss the whole vision by an effort, but he would not make it; it amused him like a wild dream, and he almost laughed at the spasmodic workings of Elkanah's face. But his diversion changed to the most dreadful sensation of horror when he heard his phantoms speak in human tones!

"Hush, on thy life, thou Jewish devil! a word, and I crush thee," said Blood, in an awful under tone.

"Colonel Blood! is it indeed you?" gasped the affrighted wretch.

"Look on me; thou hast some cause to know me," replied Blood.

"Hist! wake him not, and both our fortunes are made," said Elkanah, in a low, crawling tone. "I vil share vid you, Blood, like a brother! Serve him as you served his father, and ve vill divide the spoil: it vill make us both for ever; tree tousand pounds, Blood!"

"Give me the dagger!" said Blood, quietly disarming him. "Stand there! if thou but move a hair's breadth this steel is buried in thy heart."

The apothecary cowered abjectly down, and Blood moved towards the bed; but he stood as if irresolute, and muttered, "I cannot, I dare not look at him *there!* Ho, Mervyn, Master Mervyn!"

Mervyn could not but think that his fevered imagination was playing him false, and repeating the dire

phases of his father's murder; but the illusion began to grow too terrific. He resolved to break it, by palpably convincing himself of the non-existence of the spectre before him: he arose; but with such a strong air of likeness and existence did the whole group strike him, that he involuntarily exclaimed "Blood!"

The colonel glared round, and a beam of firelight falling on the prisoner's form, he seemed as if thunderstruck, staggered a few paces back, and fell against the wall, with a shock which struck on Mervyn the full conviction that it was a material substance. His first effort was to spring at the dagger; his next to rush to the fire, and attempt by stirring the embers to obtain some light. He then faced his enemies, but Elkanah and Blood were both gazing at him in an agony of fear, the latter half raised on his elbow.

"Colonel Blood, do you not know me?" he said, at length in tones which, without intending it, were really awful in depth and horror.

"Mercy, mercy, Aumerle!" groaned Blood; "Mercy, my lord! I slew thee, but take not my soul to everlasting fires! I would have saved your son—I will save him—any thing to remove thy never-ceasing wrath!"

"If you would save the son of Aumerle, I am he!" replied Mervyn. "Dost thou not know me, murderer?"

"Is it thou, in thy bodily form; thou, Mervyn?" exclaimed he, shuddering convulsively.

"It is I—Mervyn of Aumerle."

"I come to save you at the risk of my life!" said Blood, leaping briskly up. "Come, come! there is no time to

be lost; if discovered life is the least thing lost. Where is the Jew assassin?"

"If you mean me, I am here," said Elkanah, with a look of fiendish hate. "But beware how you hurt but a hair of my head! At my Lady Howard's command I have *poisoned your wound.* I alone possess the antidote —I alone can save you from the most horrible death, a slow and living rot! Now kill me, if you dare!"

"I did dream as much," said Blood, wildly. "But if thou hast poisoned my wound, I know this much of surgery, 'tis too far gone to be cured: but I reserve thee for a worthier fate than my dagger. Hast any arms?"

The fire now blazed brightly up, and by its light Blood searched the villain, but he found no weapon. He then lifted the tapestry, and Mervyn saw with amazement a square hole about two feet high, which seemed formed by the displacing of one of the huge stones in the wall. "Enter there, Mervyn!—fear nothing," he said. "It is a secret passage contrived in the thickness of the wall, and leads to liberty. Elkanah, follow—I will be last."

Mervyn hesitated—a dreadful idea crossed his mind that the whole was but a delusion got up to entice him to some secret slaughter-house; but could they not as easily take thither his dead carcase? He entered after an instant's hesitation, and the look which he gave Blood as he did so, told him that the great secret was discovered, and Lord Aumerle's murder no longer a suicide.

He groped his way into the dark hole on all fours,

for it was not high enough to admit of any other posture; the apothecary followed, and then Blood. Mervyn heard a loud crashing noise follow, and Blood called out that he had closed the spring marvellously well—and then he laughed. There was now not a gleam of light, but utter, almost palpable darkness; the passage was so narrow that Mervyn could hardly force himself along; and the air was so thick and dusty that it almost stifled him. He groped his way along, however, and his knowledge that the old poisoner was close behind, perhaps with a weapon, gave him the serpent's strength to crawl.

It was a terrific passage, and would have been impassable to all but resolution of the most extraordinary description. It was probably contrived in the original architecture, for it seemed impossible to have been made at any subsequent period, so massive were the stones of that tower, and so curiously welded together. Narrow as it was, to Mervyn's horror the way seemed to grow narrower, and abominable as Blood's voice was in his ears, it sounded like sweet music when it called to him that all was right. At last, though it widened, the height of the passage seemed to diminish, until grovelling as he did perfectly flat, Mervyn could strike his head against the roofing with scarcely lifting it. His lungs panted for want of air, and the horrors of suffocation seemed to threaten him. At the same time he was assailed by the dreadful idea that his companions would retreat, and leave him to die in the unfathomable horrors of a living tomb! For a moment he

thought of forcing his way back, but the narrowness of the space prohibited all idea of the sort.

His eyes and mouth were now choked in dust, and he called to Blood that he was suffocating; in reality he was rapidly yielding to the horror of his situation, and a moment's deprivation of his faculties in such a situation was equivalent to giving himself up to death. But Blood did not seem to hear him, and making a last effort, he pushed forward a few feet, and felt with extatic joy that there was suddenly space above his head. The passage was now both wider and higher, but it seemed to Mervyn as if they were hastening down an inclined plane. The height of the passage gradually increased, though the width was seldom more than that of a bulky man, and at last Mervyn found that he could raise his aching backbone. In a few more steps he could stand upright, but Blood assured him it was premature to do so, though they were near their exit. In fact he was forced to go again on his hands and feet, and finally ramp on the earth, drawing himself painfully along like a wounded eel. But he now began to feel a cold breezy air, which encouraged him, and wonderfully revived his exhausted spirits.

Suddenly he perceived a dull blue light, like that at the top of a chimney, and straining every nerve, in a few moments he had forced his body out at a narrow aperture, and found himself in great darkness, but with plenty of room to move about.

He was joined immediately by a figure which he took to be the apothecary, but he instantly knew it

was Blood, by the voice. He inquired where Elkanah was. Mervyn replied that he knew not, and Blood stood apparently puzzled for a moment.

"The villain!" he said, in a hollow tone "Ho, Elkanah, make haste back—fate gives thee one more chance for thy villanous life!"

There was no reply, but a grating sound was heard, and the hole whence they had made their exit, closed with a massive stone, as if by some mighty spring set at work, so that the wall seemed whole and perfect as ever.

"Do you hear that?" said Blood, in an awe-struck tone. "Poor wretch! he knows not that the spring will not open from the inside."

"He hath returned to give the alarm," said Mervyn.

"Hath he?" said Blood, with a bitter laugh. "They will hear him at the day of judgment then. But his fate's of his own carving. He must do as well as he can—and so must we. He is there with his great secret of endless life, and I trow me, will be immortal tomorrow. We are on the steps of the Traitor's Gate—hear you not the roar of the moat? Some dozen steps are here, and at the bottom is the water: when you feel well your feet, plunge deeply beneath the spikes of the gate, and follow the cut."

Blood himself set the example by running down and plunging; Mervyn unhesitatingly followed the example, and after a deep dive in the muddy water, found himself outside the gate, in the moat, shone on by as lovely a moon as ever welcomed man to liberty. Blood led

the way to the opposite bank, and they scrambled out just under the thick shadow of the chestnuts, which in those days was called the Ladies' Walk.

"You are safe now if you can keep yourself perdue for a few hours," said Blood, triumphantly. "Give me your hand—say you forgive me!"

"I cannot—your hand is red with my father's blood!" replied Mervyn.

"Folly—madness—to chaffer now; but I must not leave my work half done: come with me and resume your canonicals. Follow me!" and Blood led the way to a miserable pot-house near the Tower.

CHAPTER XVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL'S LAST RIDE.

HAVING washed himself, and put on the disguise which Blood had provided, Mervyn began to ruminate on his extraordinary escape, and on what was necessary to perfect it. He was interrupted by Blood, who came in looking ghastly pale in the dawning light.

"That villain spoke truth!" he said, pantingly. "The anguish of my wound passes all belief; I am on fire in my vitals. For God's pity, Mervyn, assist me to crawl to my old burrow in Alsatia, to die. It is revenge enough for thee to have inflicted the blow whereof I feel I shall not long complain."

Mervyn looked at the wan and miserable countenance of the strong man, whom in former days he had seen in all the insolence of strength; and he could scarce forbear compassionating the woeful figure which he now

presented—tears of anguish running down his cheeks. He assented by silence rather than words, and they walked forth together on as lovely a morning as ever broke.

Early as it was, the streets seemed in a state of great bustle and movement. They could not divine the reason, and were not without apprehensions, until passing Newgate, they heard St. Sepulchre's bell tolling for an execution. A crowd was assembled round the gates, a troop of soldiers and a posse of constables. Blood asked who was to be hanged, and a bystander answered that it was Claude Duval, and seemed quite astonished that any one could ask the question.

Almost as this answer was given the gate rolled open, and a cart, drawn by two black horses, appeared. It was painted black, and the sides were ornamented with grinning deaths' heads and crossbones. There was a coffin studded with bright nails on the front, and leaning gracefully on it sat Claude Duval, dressed, as it seemed, with peculiar care on the occasion. He wore a suit of brown velvet, very richly embroidered with silver, violet gloves, and a red silk nightcap, with the tassel of which he played negligently. The ordinary in his long black gown, and the hangman in his greasy leather doublet, were the other personages honoured with a seat in the conveyance. The sheriffs and some gentlemen followed in a gilded carriage, and two files of musketeers walked on each side.

A shout of welcome greeted the advance of the cortege, and Claude bowed graciously, pressing his hand

to his heart. He had something of the sickly tint of the dungeon, but the bright morning and the shout restored his usual high colour, and his eye ranged curiously among the crowd, as if he were seeking the countenances of old friends and acquaintances.

"I must bid Claude farewell!" said Mervyn, forcing his arm from Blood's grasp, who would have detained him, but finding the effort in vain, he handed him a sealed packet. "Be careful of it—it is your pardon!" he exclaimed, as Mervyn mechanically took it. The words fell without significance on his ear, but he put the packet in his bosom, and pushed on. The crowd, taking him for some minister bent on thrusting protestant truths on the popish highwayman, gave way, and Mervyn soon reached the cart.

"Claude Duval!" he said, in his well-known accents, "would you die like a dog without succour of religion?"

Duval, who was now glancing at a missal, turned sharply round, and stared astonishedly at Mervyn, who touched his lips significantly, and Claude, with ready wit, took the hint.

"I have refused the consolations of this gentleman," he said, "but mayhap he will not in his charity refuse to let the hungry eat, though it be not bread of his baking."

"A popish priest in disguise, eh, merry Claude?" said the ordinary, who was of the Vicar of Bray's school, and fancied he saw the times changing. "Well, well, every man to his taste—hist, sir, your hand?" and he assisted Mervyn to get into the cart.

Mervyn and Claude embraced with much emotion, a d Claude eagerly inquired in French how he came to be at liberty. In a few brief words the former related his marvellous escape, and Duval listened with a breathless interest which seemed to turn his attention altogether from his own deplorable position.

"Thank God, thank God!" he said, "I have lived to know that my suspicions were well-founded, and I die not with an unjust thought in my heart. Oh, that remorseless villain! would I could live only to avenge my noble master!"

"It needs not; the blow I inflicted is mortifying with cankerous poisons," replied Mervyn.

"This is justice, and it makes me think my lot in the next world will be better than in this," said Claude, sadly. "I have shed no man's blood, and not an eye of all these looks at me with reproach. No orphan's groan, no widow's shriek, shall follow me to the bar above, and I doubt if those who condemned me can say as much. The women, Heaven bless them! you will not see a dry eye among them; Claude Duval has lived in their smiles, and he will die in their tears. Besides, I confessed and received absolution last night from the gran padre himself?"

"What gran padre, Claude?"

"Oliva himself—your ancient protector. He hath come over secretly, to direct the great revolution which is restoring England to the church. I told him all your sorrows, your loves, misadventures, and what not. He was astonished to learn that the famous conspirator

was his little protégé, and promised to attempt something in your favour."

"Then 'tis he who hath obtained my pardon—or what was it that Blood said?" exclaimed Mervyn, drawng out the packet.

A paper appeared sealed with the great seal of England, and with a surprise which may be well conceived, he found a pardon, in which his legitimacy was acknowledged; but it was conditioned that he should reside abroad for three years.

"I have lived long enough," said Claude, joyfully. "But can this possibly be done by Oliva? He told me the king's hate was inexorable. Have you no other friend, Mervyn?"

A dreadful thought darted into the young man's mind, but he strove to reply in the negative with calmness. Meanwhile the words "pardon," though pronounced in French, reached the ears of the crowd, and a general cry arose of "Claude is pardoned!" followed by an equally general hurrah!

"I wish you would prove your words, gentlemen," said Claude, shaking his head mournfully. "But you have not left your warm beds so early for nothing—Claude Duval is to be hanged sure enough."

"Oh, Duval!—and but for your goodness to me you were not here," said Mervyn, much affected.

"That is my only comfort, sir; but 'tis as well today as any other," replied Claude. "I thank God, I die fulfilling the oath which I made to my noble master, your father. And now I may tell you his dying

words and wish. 'Teach my son to weep for me, to honour my memory, tell him his father loved him best when least he seemed.' Oh, my dear master!"

As he spoke Mervyn melted into tears.

"Nay, my lord," he continued—"I warrant, I shall not be the last to give you that title—do not take the stiffening out of me. I would die as good game as any beef-fed Englishman of them all. I will not shame fair France at the gallows. Vive la France! vive la France! If ever you live to have your own, Master Mervyn, give me a faithful dog's place at my master's feet; for you will take him out of his grave in the Tower ditch?"

The shouts of a dense mob, closely wedged together, now announced their arrival in the Tyburn road. The great curiosity of the eager masses was to witness Claude's arrival in St. Giles's, where, at a tavern, occupying the site of an old hospital, according to ancient custom, prisoners were presented with a bowl on their way to execution.

The scattered little village now came in sight, looking bright, and green, and cheerful in the transparent beauty of the morning. Who could think of death while contemplating the sunny verdure of trees, the sweet serene blue of the sky, the glittering weather-cocks on the roofs, the playful shine on the ponds, and busy animation of all things living! Claude's cheek did, nevertheless, blanch as they approached the Crown —the resting-place whence the stirrup-cup of the last

journey was wont to issue. The inn came in sight, with its innumerable chimneys and carved balcony, but Mervyn's attention was turned towards Sydney's deserted mansion, peeping above the woods, and half concealed in their autumn luxuriance.

It seemed as if it were some day of festival instead of sorrow and death. A bright flag waved from the roof of the Crown, and the light Italian verandah over its rustic portico was crowded with gay groups of cavaliers and ladies of rank, in masks. Among the latter, one was conspicuous by the whiteness of her throat and symmetrical chin, though her face was well concealed by a black vizor.

To the superstitious eye of one going to death this glittering mass, with their black faces, might well have kindled an idea of fiends looking on with satisfaction at the sight; but in Claude it roused recollections of mirth and festival, which sought relief in a heavy sigh.

A shout, and the dead halt of the procession, announced its arrival before the inn, and immediately a stout handsome girl with a silver tankard in her hand, followed by a jolly bluff-looking host, who carried a can of some bright red liquor, appeared at the cart.

"Good bye, Duval—honest Duval for all you are to be hanged," said the host, heartily shaking Claude by the hand. "Thou art going aloft, good fellow, and though it be to the mast-head, many a worse fellow shall stand on the world's deck to-night."

"Good bye, Jack Edwards—hearty Jack!" said

Claude, "and bonny Mistress Edwards! give me but one parting kiss of your sweet lips, that I may go out of the world with a rosy taste on my mouth."

And bending gracefully down, he saluted the pretty hostess ere she could say nay.

"Well, well, Duval, thou art a merry fellow to the last—good claret to the lees," she said, smilingly. "See you now, my good man knows you were never much of an ale-bibber, so we have brought you a stoup of our very best Burgundy, at which half the gallants of the city have smacked their lips."

And suiting the action to the word, the hostess handed him a glittering tankard of the beverage. Claude raised it up and looked at the gay verandah—for a moment Mervyn saw that his hand trembled. The lady with the fair neck was now heard to sob, and taking a rich nosegay from her breast, she threw it to Claude, saying in a sweet but tremulous voice, "God pity thee, brave Duval!"

"'Tis Mistress Gwyn," said Claude in a whisper, as he stooped to pick up the flowers, and kissing them, he put them gallantly in his bosom. He then waved the full tankard, and exclaiming, "To the women of France and England!" drank, but not deeply. He then handed the cup to Mervyn, who touched it to his lips, and passed it to the ordinary, who declined with a mournful shake of the head. Claude then handed it to the hangman, observing, "It will do thee good, friend! steady thy hand," and the functionary drained it to the dregs.

"Well, I ain't dainty," said Edwards, as the goblet

came back; "I would drink after a dog, but not after that murderer by trade—so here's to your health and prosperous voyage, Duval, in the can!"

And he took a hearty swig, handing it afterwards to his wife, who followed his example. The signal was then given to proceed, and with a farewell bow at the verandah, on went the prisoner and his train.

As the cart turned towards Tyburn, and its fatal trees came in sight, Claude's face flushed deeply, and in a low voice he desired Mervyn to assist him with the prayers of the catholic church: Mervyn, though much moved, complied. He chanted the Litany for the dying, which he had learned at St. Omer, and Claude devoutly joined in the responses. The mob, although nearly all fanatic anti-papists, offered no interruption, but listened in solemn silence. Tyburn was now distinctly in sight; the black gallows appeared above the trees. The cart drove slowly over the turfy ground, and came at last to the tremendous halt.

Claude sprung up, pressed Mervyn's hand, and leaped on the ladder, which he ascended with a firm step to the scaffold. Mervyn followed, and was by his side instantly. Claude thanked him with a look of silent but emphatic eloquence. The ordinary, considering his services superfluous, remained in the car, and the executioner followed, concluding the procession.

"And now, sir, leave me—you look as if you were going to be hanged yourself," said Claude; and he added in a whisper, "I see a scowling pair of eyes fixed on you in the throng; besides, I would not you should see

me dangling there like a scarecrow in an orchard. Farewell, my dear, dear master! Heaven bless you!"

Overcome by emotion, Mervyn and his faithful protector embraced for the last time; but Mervyn would not leave him, and, at his desire, he commenced murmuring a miserere in a low voice, while Claude mounted to the fatal drop. Mervyn saw them draw the cap over his face, and sobs choked his own utterance; but Duval called out in a merry tone, "Get a mass said for my soul, master, and commend me to beauteous Mistress Sydney!" and then muttering a short prayer, the dismal "Ha!" from the mob, as if every man had received a blow in the breast, announced that the fatal drop had descended.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOVE AND DEATH.

WHILE Claude Duval went through the last act of his drama, another scene was enacting on a far different stage—the royal palace of Whitehall. About noonday, a massive gilded coach, such as was used by the prime nobility of the time, drew up at the great gate, and two ladies dismounted. These were the Lady Howard and Aurora Sydney — the latter in deep mourning. Chiffinch was in waiting, and escorted them with ceremonious respect to a magnificent apartment. It included a great variety of chambers and cabinets, apparently fitted up for female habitation, in a most profuse style. The saloon in which they were at last allowed to remain was hung with rich French tapestry, representing scenes of licentious gaiety, drinking, love-making, shepherds and shepherdesses lounging in arti-

ficial landscapes, and attending to any thing but their sheep. Richly gilded furniture, candelabra, vases of massy silver, curious birds, and glittering Italian curiosities, were crowded around.

Chiffinch observed, with a smile, that these were the apartments of the late Lady Castlemaine. Aurora seemed scarcely to notice that he spoke to her, or of the gorgeous show around; she threw herself into a chair, and seemed absorbed in revery. Once or twice she put her hand to her bosom, and, as if satisfied that what she sought was there, relapsed into profound thought; insomuch, that she heeded not the disappearance of Lady Howard, who, after whispering a little with Chiffinch, glided out. The latter drew a table of inlaid gold, covered with caskets and fragrant vases, towards the lady, and retired also.

Aurora looked round, and smiled with a ghastly expression; but her meditations, whatever their nature, soon terminated. There was a slight tap at the door, and a cavalier entered, exquisitely dressed, perfumed, jewelled, fresh, gay, and sparkling as a bridegroom. It was the king. A momentary blush crimsoned Aurora's cheek; she sprang up, advanced a few steps, and knelt as Charles extended his hand in welcome. He raised her immediately.

"No, dear Aurora, that posture is rather mine," he said, with a triumphant smile.

"Mock not your woful suppliant, sire!" she said, as he kissed her hand tenderly.

"Nay, I am the suppliant now," he replied, leading

her to a seat, near which he drew another for himself. "Yet you can ask nothing of me which I will refuse. What is it, dearest?"

And he gazed at her for a moment, as a wolf gazes at its prey; but he was obviously startled with her excessive paleness, and the wild, unnatural brilliancy of her eyes.

"What would you ask, lovely Sydney?" he said at last, observing that she could not speak from the intensity of her emotion. "All that Charles of England hath is yours—his realm—himself. These apartments are yours—Richmond is yours—the proudest title your woman's fancy can shape. Nay, I will even pledge myself, if my wife dies, to make you queen of England in her room. My brother did as much with a poorer cause, and the common sort applauded him. Did he not marry Hyde's daughter, whom I reared from a dunghill, and your house is, perchance, as ancient as ours."

"Instead of all these immense gifts, I only ask a single life!" said Aurora — "a life which taken will cover your name with perpetual dishonour—spared, will redeem it almost to men's love."

"Your father's—he shall be spared," said Charles. "Have I not already pardoned one whose blood my soul panted for—the traitor Mervyn?"

"He lacks no pardon of yours, sire!—Mervyn hath escaped from the Tower, or the news which sets all London agape is false!" replied Aurora, with a smile of unearthly horror: "unless, thou false king, and

every way most monstrous betrayer, hast had him privily murdered and buried him from the accusing light of day."

"I swear to you, Aurora, by all that is sacred, he is living and breathing at this moment, for aught I know to the contrary," said Charles, turning pale. "He hath bribed his warders, or flown through the air!—what do I know?"

"Well, he is dead and gone," said Aurora with mad serenity. "So no more bargaining for him—only my father's head is in the market now. Pardon him—release him from his durance—and I will believe you."

"You ask too much," said Charles; "his life is sacred as mine own—but his pardon and release must be the work of time. My brother—all my faction—for I am but the head of a faction—would turn round on me, like mad dogs on their master."

"You think to betray me, ha!—and to butcher him too!" exclaimed Aurora with wild vehemence. "But I will believe in no pledge, no oaths, no heaven-shaking protestations—nothing but facts."

"What would you have?" exclaimed Charles; "methinks I would hazard all—crown—life—vengeance—to win but one angelic smile from those pale lips."

"Your council, they tell me, is sitting now to decide upon my father's death," replied Aurora. "Go to those blood-thirsty men—tell them you are a king, and that the royalest virtue of a king is mercy!—tell them

that enough blood has been shed in this baffled conspiracy—that Sydney is innocent, and that if he be guilty you are resolved to pardon him! Send then to the lieutenant of your Tower—bid him release his prisoner—and return to me for—for your reward!"

"By heaven, thou movest me," said the king, irresolutely gazing at her. "Enough blood hath indeed been shed—I will not burthen my soul with more. I will to the council—I will do your bidding to the letter—let Oliva and York prate as they will. But you must not quit me ever again, loveliest!—these apartments must henceforth be yours, and as soon as I have done your will with the council, I will return, to bask in the full sunshine of your restored beauty and love!"

"It shall be so!" she said with a ghastly smile, and suffering Charles to press his hot lips to hers without reluctance, and almost without consciousness, she sat gazing steadfastly at him. Charles felt that this scene was growing indescribably painful to himself—it seemed as if she read the inmost secrets of his soul in that long, profound, and melancholy gaze. He muttered something that she was very pale, and going to a beaufet, brought her a goblet of wine.

"No, no," she said, shuddering as she raised it to her lips—"it is blood, you see—Aumerle's blood! Go to the council; I shall be well anon—I need but peace—nothing but peace."

And reclining her sorrow-stricken form in the damask chair, she closed her eyelids in a kind of

slumber. Charles seemed to hesitate for a moment, but having satisfied himself that she breathed, he suddenly left the apartment, locking the door after him.

The moment he was gone, Aurora started up, with a strange expression of despair and triumph in her look, which seemed at once mingled and separate. She glanced around—but her eye passed unheedingly over the glitter and pomp of the gorgeous chamber; she sought only if any one observed her. There was something utterly desperate in that glance. The sun shone brightly in at the windows, and she gazed for a moment at the smiling landscape of park scenery, but it was without consciousness. A single thought seemed to have frozen fixedly in her brain. She poured some wine into a goblet deliberately, took a powder from her bosom and shook it in, every grain. "I will join him in Heaven—his unstained wife!" she said, aloud. "God is not so merciless as man—He will forgive me. He knows how far He has made humanity to endure, and that I have reached the limit. This at least is not suicide—it is murder, murder, murder!" and she repeated the word as if it consoled her.

She shook the glass round and round to mix the fine powder which stood on its surface, and it might be that something of the dark shadow of death crossed her young imagination. She started, and set the cup down; a few leaden tears rolled slowly down her cheek; but the emotion soon past, and desperate thoughts crowded thickly on her fancy, and she raised the goblet to the sun as if to admire the exquisite purple tint to which

the wine had turned by its contact with the mortal drug. She then, though but slowly, brought it to her lips, and was about to drink, when a long lean hand clutched her arm, and stopped the movement. She looked around with a stifled shriek, and saw what at first she took to be an illusion of her maddened fancy. It was a venerable old man, whose figure, though much bent and depressed with years, was still commanding, and his countenance remarkable for its antique grandeur of form and benevolence of expression. He was dressed in a thick dark mantle such as usually worn by ecclesiastics of the church of Rome, which fell in ample folds around his lofty frame.

"What wouldst thou do, unhappy one?" said the stranger, after a minute's profound pause, and in tones so full of pity and love, that Aurora looked with a kind of vacant wonder at him, and set the goblet down.

"May I not even die?" she exclaimed, after a momentary pause.

"Who hath bidden thee die—He, who alone hath the right?" said the ecclesiastic, mildly. "In His cause, and at His command, it is indeed lawful to brave all things—but where is thy celestial manumission, that thou darest to throw off the yoke he has imposed?"

"What mean you?—May I not taste the king's wine?" said Aurora, wildly and affrightedly staring at the apparition.

"And dost thou fear a creature—thou, who wert about to rush unsummoned into the presence of the Creator?" he replied, solemnly. "Look not so amaz-

edly at me; I know that this cup overflows with poison. Nay, more, I have been an unseen spectator of your interview with the king; I know all your bygone misfortunes; and I am here to save you from one greater than all—a death like this."

"The king keeps not so niggard a house that you need grudge me this draught," said Aurora, with wild fierceness. "I am the king's visiter; no one shall hinder me from sharing his hospitality."

And she clutched the goblet in both her slender hands, glaring with mad defiance in the old man's face.

"Nay, drink," he said, hindering her in no respect, save with his hand gently on her arm; "drink, but not with the tremendous thought that thereby you commit suicide! It is but a soporific draught of great power."

"Hath he, too, deceived me?" sighed Aurora, in a heart-broken tone.

"You mean Colonel Blood?" replied the priest. "Yes, to thy immortal benefit! He and I plotted to save Mervyn, and the only bait that could tempt the king, alas! was thy illstarred loveliness. And even when he consented to pardon thy lover, it seems a black plot was at work that should have rendered this mercy of no effect. But the malice of Mervyn's enemies worked only his safety. They confined him in a dungeon which has a secret adit; and he is now safe and at liberty."

"No, no, he is murdered—he is buried, all mangled, in the Tower!" gasped Aurora.

"And think not that it were possible to save your father!" continued the Jesuit. "The king is pledged by many oaths to give his head to the axe; the short dream of passion over, his cruelty will regain the upper hand."

"And who art thou who speak to me with this usurped authority?" said Aurora, drying her streaming eyes, with a vain effort at composure.

"The friend of Mervyn's childhood—your friend—all men's friend, save those who rage in savage ignorance against the church—Johannes de Oliva, a servant of Christ, and general of all his societies."

"O, father, father! and will you abandon me to the tyrant?" said Aurora, wildly clasping her hands.

"No, my child; rather will I perish myself," replied the Jesuit, compassionately. "But we must deal subtly as with subtle men—all things to all. Drain this goblet —*now*,—a deep slumber only will follow; but we will make the king believe that, in your despair, you have swallowed poison. He will then comprehend the vastness of a hate which, in so young and tender a woman, could overcome the fear of a painful death. Drink, child! you see I do not fear to taste it;" and he sipped from the cup.

"Give it me; I do not fear to drain it," she said, eagerly raising it to her lips; but a sudden suspicion checked her. She looked at the priest with a troubled eye. "Can it be," she said, "that thou betrayest me, priest — dreading of a failure in my resolution? — do

you fear in me a rival to your authority?—Eager for the blood of Sydney, fear you his daughter's influence over the tyrant's heart?"

"Wherefore should I stay this hand then when the draught of death—if such it were—was on your lips?" said Oliva, sadly. "But be it as you will!—I force you not to drink—methinks I hear footsteps."

"But what if—abandoned in sleep—Oh, horror!" shrieked Aurora, clasping the monk's tremulous hand.

"Heaven make these words my last, if I mean you ill!" he said, solemnly. "Can you not trust one who so loved your Mervyn, that to my childless age, he almost seemed a dear and well-loved son?"

"Yes, I *will* trust you—the issue be with Heaven!" said Aurora, and she drained the goblet to the dregs.

"Lovely martyr!—alas! how sudden it is!" exclaimed Oliva. "How feel you?—you look dull and faint, child?"

"All things reel about me—my heart is clogged with some heavy weight!" sighed Aurora, very faintly. The Jesuit put his arm round her sinking form, and almost carried her over the room to a couch of silver tissue, on which she sunk. Imagination probably hastened the natural agency of the potion; she lay for a moment gazing with faint eyes in the monk's face, who still held her hand, and then she sunk into a profound sleep. Her countenance and figure looked so calm and sepulchral, that but for the light breathing of her lips, she might have been a marble chiselling of repose. Oliva

arranged her garments with fatherly care, laid the cup beside her with its glistening dregs, and then paused a moment to survey the sleeper. Tears came to his aged eyes, but hearing footsteps in the corridor, he retreated behind the gilt curtains of a window, which had been his former hiding-place.

The door opened and Charles entered nimbly, his features flushed with excitement. He looked around, uttered an exclamation of surprise, not at first perceiving Aurora, but his eye glanced at the couch, and in a moment he was kneeling beside it. But suddenly he started up as if stung by an adder, and stood aghast, gazing at the white and motionless form. He seemed to be stupified for some minutes, when he clutched up the goblet and eagerly examined it, letting it fall to the ground as the terrible certainty rushed upon him. He called her name, he shook her, and finding that the lethargy defied all attempts to break it—that she fell lifelessly on the couch when he raised her—he rang a bell on the table with frantic violence. Chiffinch rushed in, but ere he reached the king, Oliva was there.

"What is the matter, my son?" he said, very calmly.

"Oh, Oliva, look there!—I have killed her—it is Sydney's daughter—she has taken poison!" groaned Charles. "Chiffinch, raise her—it cannot be—she is not dead!"

"Here then are all the fruits of your guilty passion, sire?" said Oliva, gazing mournfully at the seeming

corpse. "Oh, my son!—for dust like this wouldst thou have bartered thine heavenly and temporal good for ever?"

"Madden me not, monk!" said Charles, wildly. "She is dead—she is dead, Chiffinch."

"Thou art mad, already, king!" said Oliva. "Again, I say, wouldst thou have sacrificed so much for one who prefers death to you?"

"She is not dead—she shall not die—she breathes!" shouted the king. "Chiffinch, bring a physician—antidotes—where is Hudson?"

"It is the stupor of death — she has swallowed poison," said Oliva. "Chiffinch, stay, I command you —we will make no scene for the mob. Bear her from these apartments to those of Mistress Gwyn—the scandal will be less apparent. For Heaven's sake, stay where you are, sire!—I will bring you news."

And making a sign to Chiffinch, they lifted the cushion on which the lady reposed, and bore her away; while Charles, clasping his hands in mute agony, sunk breathlessly into a chair.

CHAPTER XIX.

RETRIBUTION.

It was with a feeling of the most utter despondency that Mervyn descended from the scaffold whereon had perished the faithful servant of his house; and totally disregarding or forgetting Claude's intimation about his being observed, he resolved to find out Blood, and learn the truth, as to the means by which his pardon had been obtained. Not doubting that he should find the colonel in his old haunts of Whitefriars, he took his way towards the river. As he went past Whitehall, however, a muffled figure brushed close past him, without pausing to apologise, though he looked back. Mervyn would scarcely have noticed this in his present mood, but that he had observed he was for some time followed by the same figure, who now took this rude means of gratifying his curiosity. A glance convinced

Mervyn that it was Lord Howard, much as he endeavoured to keep himself concealed. He took his resolution immediately, and affecting to take no further notice, cut rapidly into the Mall, and thence to Hyde Park, observing with satisfaction that the figure still followed. Pausing at length in an obscure and retired spot, overshadowed by lofty oaks, Mervyn crouched at the trunk of one of them, and awaited till his follower arrived almost close to him, looking anxiously around, but at too high a level to perceive him. He then sprang up.

"Good day to you, master shadow!" he exclaimed. "Prithee, are you in love with a kick, that you dodge so nigh my heels?"

"Is it you, indeed, Captain Mervyn?" said the figure, staring incredulously as if he had seen a ghost.

"No, I am not Captain Mervyn," replied the young man, quivering with passion. "I am Mervyn of Aumerle, son of the earl that was murdered in the Tower, and thou art Howard of Eskricke, who caused his murder; and we two will not lightly part. Draw!" And his sword flashed in his hand, but not with so fierce a sparkle as his eye shot forth.

Howard delayed not an instant, and their blades met with a violence which he did not expect; his hand wavered, and his sword flew instantly into a thousand splinters.

"Curse on your hand—the advantage is yours!" he exclaimed. "Take my life—I value it not at the chink of a bad halfcrown."

And he stood with dogged composure before Mervyn,—who raised his sword, but Howard never shrunk, and that moment had probably been his last, but for an inexplicable refinement of revenge which occurred to his enemy. "No, traitor! take a fitter recompence; thou art not worthy to die by a true man's sword—be the gallows branded on thy brow!"

Two bright slashes over his forehead were all that Howard felt, but the blood suddenly gushed into his eyes—and he knew that an indelible brand was fixed on his brow. Language can only faintly shape the horror of such a punishment to a man like Howard.

"Kill me!" he yelled, as Mervyn stood as if enjoying the bitter feast of revenge. "I prefer death—a million deaths!"

"No, live—live wretch! to be the scorn and hatred of the world!" said Mervyn, with a fearful laugh.

"And live thou to envy me in my misery!" retorted Howard—"live to this knowledge—thy life, thy pretended legitimacy, are bought at the price of Aurora Sydney's dishonour. Thy remorseless mother bore her to Whitehall—to *him!*—this morning. She is his!—Live, now my Lord Aumerle, to imitate thy father!"

Mervyn stood for some moments as if rooted to the spot. "'Tis as I thought!" he said at length. "'Tis all over now.—But think not, Howard, to provoke me to take the curse from thy brow, and slay thee! Live, renegade! live, seducer!—but henceforth no man shall be deceived in thee, for wherever thou goest thy branded brow proclaims thee."

As he concluded these words, he folded his cloak round his naked sword, and strode off without even looking behind him, leaving Howard fixed like a statue of despair.

Mervyn plunged instantly among some thickets, and taking a by-path, reached the river. His perturbed resolutions were now again altered. He determined to seek an interview with Sydney in the Tower, at whatever risk, and learn from him the real state of the affair; for he concluded that, if Aurora were indeed sacrificed, he too must have received a reprieve or pardon.

A two-oared sculler, at which he himself plied like a madman, soon brought him to the Tower; and as no one, announcing himself as Sydney's friend, was denied access to him now that friendship could be of no service, he was readily admitted. A warder escorted him to the White Tower, in which Sydney was confined, and ushered him into a large, handsome apartment, well furnished, lighted by candelabra and with a brilliant fire. The warder ushered him in, and bolted the door after him.

Sydney looked up with evident surprise. He was reading a paper to two gentlemen sitting near him—one of them the Lord Cavendish, the other a grave, aristocratic-looking man, whose likeness to Sydney stamped him as his near kinsman, even if Mervyn had not instantly recognised him as the Earl of Leicester.

"Good heavens, Mervyn!" exclaimed Sydney. "Is it indeed you, rash boy? After escaping from the

lion's jaws, do you rush into them again? or are you come to teach us how to get out at a keyhole?"

"No, colonel, you have no subterraneous entrance contrived for murder!" said Mervyn, wildly. "But I defy the lion; his teeth are drawn. See you here—I am pardoned—my rights acknowledged—nay, 'tis the great seal."

He handed the document as he spoke to Sydney, who, after glancing over it in mute astonishment, handed it to the two noblemen.

"Good saints! and what mighty service have you done to be thus rewarded?" said the colonel, amazedly. "Or are you a magician, Mervyn?"

"Have you not got your reprieve yet?" exclaimed Mervyn.

"No, heaven knows, unless you call yonder death-warrant a reprieve from the toils and tyranny of this earth?" said Sydney, pointing to a paper. "It is a gauntlet which I have taken up and answered in this appeal of mine to posterity, which, after all, is my judge—not Jeffreys."

"Has not your daughter sent you a reprieve?" said Mervyn, still more wildly.

"Alas, poor soul, no. My brother, Leicester, was indeed so unadvised as to sanction Lady Howard's taking her to the levee, to implore a pardon for me; and on a failure, which was inevitable, she hath been insensible ever since at Aumerle-house," said Sydney, with much agitation of voice and look.

"And dated from this noon's council?" said Mervyn.

"It is impossible—it cannot be—it would outrage heaven too far to sacrifice the father and dishonour the daughter in one brief sundown."

"What mean you, Mervyn?" said Sydney, turning very pale.

The meaning was soon explained. Mervyn related his escape—his rencontre with Howard—the tidings concerning Aurora, in a few brief words, yet left no important circumstance untouched. Sydney listened with an anguish which at length vanquished all his stoicism, and, covering his face with his hands, groaned as if in the agonies of a painful death.

"My niece!" exclaimed Leicester, in whom family pride predominated—"the granddaughter of the great Sydney, and of almost royal Northumberland! This shall not be endured—all Christendom shall ring with it. Old and feeble as I am, my house hath still its friends; and we shall try, we shall try—Alas! what can we do?"

"Take comfort, dear colonel," said Lord Cavendish. "If she hath consented to such dishonour, she is no longer your daughter, nor worth a single tear."

"Had it been but her death—I could have borne it—I could still have found comfort," said Sydney. "But her dishonour leaves me none—nothing." And he yielded to the intolerable anguish of his feelings, in a few hot tears which all his misfortunes had not yet extorted. But dashing them aside, he exclaimed, "Pardon me, friends!—I confess I can no longer re-

sist—but it will pass—it will pass. I will not shame our good cause with a weeping martyr. Oh, I will have vengeance yet! The sun shall draw my blood to heaven, and from thence a crimson cloud shall descend in tempests on this king-cursed earth! I leave my vengeance to my country. O, my country, my noble country, avenge me! Infamous tyrant! O God, I cannot endure this!" And again he yielded to a silent ecstasy of sorrow; no one spoke but each looked at the other with gushing eyes.

"Fool, mad woman! does she think to preserve my life on such terms?" he exclaimed, starting up. "Had she a drop of my blood in her veins, she would know it is impossible! I leave my everlasting curse npon her!—tell her so, Mervyn!—bear these as my dying words to her in her guilty pomp—she hath slain me with a keener stroke than the axe in an enemy's hand."

"But at least we shall be spared the anguish of seeing you die—you will live to vengeance, Sydney!" said Lord Cavendish.

"No, no, even if the tyrant hath subdued her sorrow-weakened fancy to believe so, I feel it cannot be!" said Sydney in a voice of deep gloom. "He pardoned Mervyn—yet the same night murder was to have made his specious clemency vain. He dares not let me live, and I thank God for it! I can now lay my head on the block with no other regret than that mine own hand cannot avenge her. I leave that task to you, Mervyn!—remember, he who values not his own life, is

master of his enemy's!—and the tyrant who deprives his victims of all hope, sharpens the dagger for his own breast."

"I will live, Sydney, I swear it, henceforth, only to vengeance!" exclaimed Mervyn, passionately. "That day, that hour, that minute I cease to live for vengeance, be my last!"

"Yet after all, this may be but another lie of Howard's," said Sydney, with a sudden gleam of hope. "I take some comfort from this death-warrant; it is dated from this day's council, at noonday; it cannot be that he is wearied already of his leman, to send her father's head to the block."

"I will hunt up Blood—I will extort from him the truth of this pardon!" exclaimed Mervyn, catching at this straw with equal eagerness. "And meanwhile my Lord Leicester may to Aumerle house, and demand to see his niece—I think it cannot be refused."

"And, Cavendish, go with my son—your presence will hinder his from being questioned of men's eyes," said Sydney. "But tarry not—bring me back swift news—lest my heart break in ignorance."

This plan was hastily adopted, and promising to return with all possible expedition, the three gentlemen left the prisoner alone, with his great sorrows.

CHAPTER XX.

A CATASTROPHE.

MERVYN and Lord Cavendish, at the former's suggestion, now bent their course to the river, to go to Whitefriars by water. It was late, but they readily procured a sculler, which Mervyn, who knew the way but too well, undertook to guide. Long as the terrible phantasmagoria of the popish plot had passed, Mervyn shuddered as he turned the rudder towards the miser's house in Whitefriars, and when the boat ran up the dark archway, his very soul sickened. They ascended the stairs gropingly, and he easily pushed open that door which he would at one time have given the world to force—and once more he was in the ruined hall. A stream of moonlight shone through the fissures of the roof, and it seemed as if the events of the intervening years suddenly effaced themselves,

and all the horrors and anguish of that terrible night returned upon him. He half thought that the dusky figure of Cavendish was a phantom of the departed. But these visions vanished before the sudden light of a torch. Their footsteps had startled some one, and Tom Hunt's burly figure appeared in the gallery above.

"Well, Hunt, how is the colonel?" said Mervyn, stepping forward in answer to the scrutinizing stare which Tom cast over the hall. "Is he here?"

"Captain Mervyn!—is it your honour?" said Tom, quietly putting a pistol in his breast which he was levelling round. "Faith, I am glad to see you—I have been hunting all over the town for you, sir, and I am nigh dead of fear, though no chicken either. Oh! the poor colonel!—you will hardly know him—he is going, sir, going—rotting piecemeal. But that's not the worst of it—he's dying like a devil—howls, gnashes his teeth, and does so beg for mercy it would make a stone pity—he won't die game, I'm afeard. Who's that—there?"

"A friend of mine," replied Mervyn. "Have you had a surgeon?"

"Yes, and he says in confidence to me, that the game's up," said Tom—"as how he couldn't last the night out, and that if he had to choose himself, he would rather be burned on a gridiron than die his death."

While Tom delivered this oration he lighted the visiters through the gallery to the miser's chamber, and as they advanced they could distinctly hear the deep measured groans of Blood, like those of an expiring

bull. There was a narrow plank put over the well, which they crossed to enter the chamber of agony. Hunt went before to announce them, and as he held his streaming torch over the bed, Mervyn was horror-struck to perceive the figure on it. Blood lay on his back, convulsively clutching the folds of the rusty counterpane—his face swollen beyond all knowledge, and covered with purple blotches as if in a plague. His black hair lay in wet masses on the pillow, and his eyes seemed absolutely spouting out of his head.

"What!—who are these in the black cloaks?" said he, gazing wildly around. "Oh, I understand—a funeral? Who is that yonder?—ha, Tom, who is that?" And he raised himself with a strong effort on his elbow, gazing intently at Mervyn, as he stood at the end of the bed.

"It is Captain Mervyn, sir," replied Tom.

"Rogue, you lie!" yelled Blood, pushing him violently back. "It is Aumerle—he whom I slew in the Tower—come to bear my soul to everlasting fires! Spirit, I defy thee! I defy all hell! I can bear the worst and challenge more! I spit upon thee, liar! I had never slain thee hadst thou not resisted! Fool! was a little paper worth so much?"

"It is thy unhappy conscience shapes thy victim in his son, Blood," said Mervyn.

"Devil! to cheat me with such musical sounds!" said Blood, brokenly. "Thou canst not forgive me—thou wilt not—'tis no use to feign. See how implacably he glares at me! But again I tell thee, thy looks have

no terror for me; I feared thee not alive, and I will not dead. I shuddered not when I heard thy blood dropping on the floor *that night*—did I not smile?—Thou liar! to say I feared thee in thy bloody sleep of death! Away, away, I scorn thee."

"Retire apart, that he may not see you; it will calm him," said Cavendish; and Mervyn stepped behind the curtains.

Blood's eye still dwelt on his vacant place with great and curious attention. "Where is he gone now?" he said at last, with apparent pleasure. "I say, Hunt, don't you think he is sufficiently avenged—look at this carcase festering alive—the hell I feel within—might he not forgive me?"

"If he has any marcy in him at all, sir," said Tom, whimperingly.

"Tom, you are a good fellow—but you will come to the gallows, lad, at last; you are too good for this world," said Blood, with a strange smile. "Don't think I'm frightened because these tortures wring a groan or so from me; I will die as I have lived—bad as many a future age shall call me, no man shall say that he who stole the crown died a coward."

"Curse 'em! I'll slit the fellow's throat that says so," sobbed Hunt, overcome with this dismal idea.

"Don't sniffle, man—don't come the cant over me—yet I was once a sabbath-goer myself," said Blood, in a tone which, even from his harsh voice, sounded plaintive. "I was once as good as any of you, and could weep like a woman at the sight of blood; but evil communication corrupts good manners, Hunt. The court

spoilt my virtues. Oh, I can recollect bounding out of school, and nutting in the woods—merry times, merry times, my liege! But whereabout is Master Mervyn? would he not come?"

"I am here," said Mervyn, again appearing.

"Ay, indeed!" said the colonel, with a long gasp. "Well, I have sent for your mother, boy, under pretext of giving up the papers and documents of your birth. I will force her to do you justice yet—but I loved her once, too—ah, too well. She used the strange magic of my despised love to make me half what I am."

"I care not for her, nor your documents; tell me, how did you procure my pardon?—Where is Aurora?" said Mervyn.

"She is safe, I trust," replied Blood. "Oh, yes, she is safe; the old monk has saved her;—but I cannot tell you now—Lady Howard knows best."

"They are coming, sir," said Tom Hunt, entering from a short absence. "I see a boat with Parrot and a muffled female in it; I warrant, 'tis she, and well disguised."

"Sirs, hide yourselves behind my bed; let her not see the wires till she is in the trap," said Blood. "Come forth at my signal. The world's turned topsy-turvy! There was a time I would have made mincemeat of ye all for a look of hers,—but I can't be damned, even to oblige Eleanor d'Aumerle—lolly, jolly, molly, folly!' he concluded, humming the burden of a nonsensical street-ballad of the time.

The witnesses of this strange scene obeyed, though

scarcely knowing what was intended, and Hunt assisted to conceal them behind the massive bedstead. The well-door opened with a sudden gust, as if an impatient hand were at it, and the commanding figure of Lady Howard, enveloped in a long mantle, with her face half concealed by a black visor, entered. Parrot lighted her with a long flaring torch as he guided her over the narrow plank, and the countess walked, without uttering a word, to her accomplice's deathbed. Hunt instantly brought his torch into requisition, and lighted up the horrors of the scene, but the lady quailed not. Their eyes met, and after several moments of earnest and emphatic gaze, Blood withdrew his, muttering, "Hard as ever!"

"Well, Mr. *Blud*, you have sent for me—I am here. What do you want?—where are the papers?" said the countess, with great rapidity of utterance.

"Bring light, Hunt, let my lady see me," said the colonel, with a deep groan. "Have you no spring of pity in your heart, though marbled over with selfishness, Lady Howard? Look at your miserable victim—Oh, Eleanor, did I deserve this at your hands?"

"At my hands, sir? what mean you?" exclaimed the countess, much agitated. "Am I then answerable for the diseases which Colonel Blood's riotous course of life—or, perchance, the malaria of this black retreat of crime and misery——"

"It was built by your ancestor, the wizard baron—he who bored the infernal passage into the Bloody

Tower, for his felonious purposes when constable there!" said Blood, in a tone of dark melancholy. "Bitterly did the punishment fall on his race. But of natural causes, I had not died for these twenty years. Eleanor, it is in vain to put an ignorant face on your work; your prisoner, Elkanah, hath confessed all."

"Elkanah! the villain lies!" she exclaimed. "I bade him retard your cure, in sooth, lest your new idiocy of remorse should interfere with my plans;—but if this hideous tetter be poison, he is a murderer, but I am none."

"Will you swear that, when the eternal record is before you?" said Blood, with a ghastly grin. "I would fain believe—I would fain believe that she for whom I have lost soul and body could not thus slay me like a mad dog! Alack! we are a nest of vipers, that sting each other for lack of other victims."

"You are revenged to the glut, colonel," said the countess, recovering her relentless calm. "Have you not let Aumerle's son loose upon me—baffled me at the moment when I was about to be rid of him for ever without a crime—for was not his life forfeit to the laws?"

"Down, down, on those stiff knees to thank God every hour that I have saved him from thy murderous intent!" said Blood. "Is he not your son? Are you not satisfied with his father's blood?"

"I did not shed it—I defy thy malice to say so!" exclaimed the countess. "I did not even consent to

his death, and but for thy pernicious instigation—I did but bid thee redeem the paper which would have ruined us all—who bade thee kill him, monster, as he slept?"

"Who was it churned me up to madness when smarting with that insolent blow?" said Blood, forcing himself up on his elbow. "Who was it spoke more than an age of words in the tremendous silence wherewith thou gavest me the dagger back again? Who was it instructed me in the secret of that infernal passage."

"It was a secret which I discovered by mere chance, decyphering the strange papers of my ancestor, for which no one but I had patience," replied the lady, deliberately. "Again I repeat, I but instructed thee to steal that fatal paper while he slept, and if the deed be mine, bitterly have I paid the forfeit! No night of quiet sleep, no day of tranquil thought! he too is false for whom I was false to all. Oh, could I have foreseen these times."

"Wherefore then repent ye not, Eleanor?" said Blood, earnestly. "'Tis not so late. Your son still lives—preserved by a series of miracles—restore to him that whereof you have wronged him—his name and heirdom."

"No, Blood, no!" said the countess, grinding her teeth with fiendish hatred. "I am of the same obstinate, blood as that you shed, which preferred death to surrender. Give me the papers, if you have any, or I go without. I shall find means enough to keep your minion at bay."

"Deem you so? then you are mistaken," said Blood,

sinking exhausted back on his pillow. "Those papers which I sold you at so dear a rate—even your own letter—are merely duplicates; the originals are in my possession. The missing dragon from the chain of the garter, with the earl's initials, I pawned to Elkanah. After his late mysterious disappearance," (this he said with a ghastly smile,) "I ransacked his treasures, and found that among them. Perfectly as he imitated the earl's hand, no man that ever knew it, seeing them compared, but will know the original,—besides—I took care that yours should be written on paper of a later water-mark than his death!"

"Blood, Blood, what ravings are these?" exclaimed Lady Howard.

"Yes, that very letter in which you acknowledged your son—the earl's attestation of his legitimacy—all that I found in Duval's cloak, are still in my possession!"

"Give them then to me, as thou hast sworn!" said the countess, dropping her mask in her agitation. "I will give thee all—every thing thou canst ask!"

"With what canst thou bribe a man dying in the midst of these horrors?" said Blood, solemnly. "What is gold, what are riches, pomp, power—all the earth to me!"

"You cannot have resolved to betray me—whom you loved once so well, dear Blood?" said Lady Howard, in a tone of melting entreaty.

"It is too late, your talisman is broken," replied the dying man. "Yet I can and will save you from open shame and exposure. Promise, to save my soul, that

you will restore Aumerle to half the estates during your lifetime—acknowledge him, and I will procure you terms for the rest."

"I will not—I cannot!" replied she, fiercely. "Coward, have you forgotten the blow his father gave you in the Tower? Slave! he spurned you like a dog."

"You have played on that string till it is broken," said the colonel. "I cannot summon gall to think of him—all my revenge glutted itself in that infernal blow! Yet I would still save you—still the magic of your early power is on my heart. Oh, Eleanor, be merciful to yourself—force me not to expose you."

"Do your worst! I defy you, trickster!" exclaimed the countess. "A deathbed repentance for such a life as thine but makes the devil laugh. Thou hast betrayed me all along—the wretch, Elkanah, would never have so betrayed me. He had done his work like a man but for thy meddling hand and pretended conscience, which is but a new trick to extort money."

"He did not betray you; let us acquit his memory of the only good deed that ever was laid to his charge," said Blood. "But you should have chosen some other weapon than my dagger—that refinement of vengeance betrayed you! Elknanah was, and is likely to continue, very true to you."

"Where is he now?" said the countess, somewhat startled.

"Fear him not—he is whence he shall never come till the great day to testify against you," replied Blood, calmly. "He is quietly coffined in that passage whence murder shall issue no more—buried as deep as the foun-

dation! He closed it on himself, not knowing that I had broken the spring at the other end, and so he is buried alive, poor man, on the very verge of discovering the secret of eternal life!"

"To what point of hellish turpitude have I reached, when to hear this horror gladdens me?" said Lady Howard, faintly. "Oh, Blood, Blood, will you give me up to the executioner, and worse, worse—to shame incalculable—to the horror of all future ages, which, understanding but my crimes, will not perceive by what an invisible hand I was urged on! That compelled marriage was the root of all my faults, which have forced on each other till I am the guiltiest wretch that ever trod beneath the Heavens uncrushed. But I would not be cursed for ever. Oh, spare me, Blood, spare me!" and she knelt, bathing his hands with a gush of tears.

"Bring the papers, Hunt," said the colonel, hastily, "I shall yield else."

Answering the call, Tom made his appearance, with an iron box carefully sealed, which he laid on the bed; the countess clutched it eagerly.

"Touch them not; you shall not even touch them till you consent to do what poor justice can yet be done!" said Blood. "Turn those tears to a gracious account, and save your own soul as well as mine."

"Where is this son of mine then?" said the countess, eagerly. "Give me the papers; what must I do for him?" Her eye met Blood's, which dwelt upon her with profound and searching earnestness.

"It will not do; it is all in vain; you are still athirst

for his blood!" exclaimed the colonel. "Ho, Lord Aumerle—witnesses! it is time."

As he spoke these words a considerable uproar overhead was heard, and a voice shouted at the trap-door above "here they are—here they are!" And the gleam of a partisan appeared above. At the same time Mervyn and Lord Cavendish rushed out, and Blood rising vehemently in his bed, yelled "Seize her, seize her! you have heard her confession; I accuse her of murder; seize her!"

"Dost thou hear, murderess of my father!" exclaimed Mervyn, clutching the countess's robe, who had started up and stood fixed in a magnificent attitude of horror. His touch seemed to break her paralysis of surprise, and uttering a thrilling shriek, she sprang towards the door—the well-door! and forgetting the narrowness of the passage over it, rushed out. A moment, and they heard an exclamation of inexpressible horror—then a struggle—then a hollow dash. At the same moment the room was crowded with soldiers, headed by Lord Howard and Sir Philip Lloyd.

"What woman is that? where is she gone?" exclaimed Howard, wildly. "Master Mervyn, you are my prisoner in the king's name!"

"It is Lady Howard; she must needs be dashed to pieces!" said Lord Cavendish, as Mervyn, breaking loose from his grasp, rushed to the well. All followed, even Blood, lately so powerless on his bed of death! Mervyn threw his torch down the dark depths, but the light was soon lost in its profound gloom.

"A rope, a rope! she cannot, she shall not die thus!" exclaimed Mervyn.

"Here is one, but it is not long enough," exclaimed Tom Hunt, "and there is water at the bottom."

"Hark, she groans; help, help me!" exclaimed Mervyn, and rushing to the bed, he tore its massive counterpane into stripes. The rest understanding his desperate purpose, aided. The work was complete in a few minutes, fastened to the rope, and securely knotted to the roller above the well, and though Cavendish sought to dissuade him, Mervyn eagerly descended, clinging and swinging over a fearful depth.

Cavendish hung the torch as far as possible down after him, but soon the light grew misty, the voices above indistinct, and it seemed as if a black fog surrounded him. Still he descended. His next sensation was that of intolerable stench, and a burning heat in the hand, caused no doubt by friction with the rope. A difficulty of breathing, increased darkness, and a singing noise in his ear, were successive perceptions; he began to feel giddy, and a dread assailed him that he was about to swoon and abandon his hold. Suddenly he felt the last notch of his rope, to which he had fastened the plank as a kind of resting-place in his descent. Not knowing what depth remained, he concluded that any farther effort was in vain, but he extended his arms groping wildly about, and striving to shout for light, but his voice was inarticulate. He lowered himself to a sitting position on the plank, and bent desperately down, gasping and almost stifled as he wasfor breath.

Suddenly he grasped something which appeared to him either like hair or weeds, and at this moment, Cavendish sent down a lamp which fell hissing in the mud, but it gave him sufficient light to see that Lady Howard lay buried in the filth, and that she was gasping convulsively.

His strength was now almost exhausted, but this sight seemed to restore it all. Observing a projecting piece of stone, lower down, he leaped upon it, and was thus obliged to abandon his hold of the rope, which flew loosely up, and probably mistaking it for a signal, those above began to roll it up. Knowing that all attempts to make them hear would be in vain, he seized the countess by her mantle, dragged her from the mud, and giving a supernatural leap, regained his seat on the plank.

Mervyn knew not whether the countess was alive or dead, but she hung motionless on his arm, and it was only by twisting it in some strange manner in the rope that he was enabled to support the terrible burden. He felt that the limb stretched severely; it seemed as if tearing out by the joint. They hung wavering over the abyss, but still they were rapidly rising; if he could only endure the agony a little longer both were safe. He could not shout, for he felt that suffocation must ensue; his eyes and ears seemed bursting with some heavy weight; a deadly sickness seemed to deprive his heart of motion; his head sunk back, his arm failed, and his reason tottered. Suddenly the burden seemed lightened as if by miracle, though he felt that it was

still on his arm, but clinging air-like; again some wonderful support seemed to raise up his own sinking frame, and then all grew bright, and numerous faces seemed straining down upon him. In a few moments he was on a level with the margin, and many arms stretched out to help him land. He now perceived that Hunt had procured a boat-hook by which he helped him up.

Howard, Cavendish, and Sir Philip carried the wretched woman to Colonel Blood's bed, where they attempted, for some time in vain, to restore her; she seemed suffering under some severe internal injury, and her lips bubbled continually with gore; but at length she opened her eyes, and with a shriek of superhuman agony, made signs that she was suffocating, and desired to be raised. Mervyn, who stood beside the pillow, raised her, and as he did so, she continued to look at him with a wild and most piteous gaze, and at length murmured, in a tone which went to the heart of all present, "My son!"

"Eleanor—Lady Howard—*I* am here," said Howard, advancing eagerly.

"Howard—Howard!—'tis Aumerle's son and mine!" she murmured, pausingly. "All ye around—I acknowledge him!—Oh, my son—my Mervyn!—Oh, that I could have thought this years ago."

"Son or no son, he is my prisoner; he hath escaped from the king's prison of the Tower!" said Howard, desperately. "Sir Philip, I call upon you to arrest him."

"On your peril, Sir Philip—he hath his pardon!" exclaimed Blood, staggering up and falling at his length on the floor.

"It is true," said Sir Philip, after carefully examining the parchment which Mervyn handed to him. "And my Lord Howard, I do think it becomes you to think of other matters when your countess lies thus."

"Pardoned!" repeated Howard, aghast.

"Pardoned, it is true!"—said Lady Howard, gaspingly; "but oh, at what a fearful price! Mervyn, she is in the king's power—Aurora!"

"Not if Elkanah's poison tell as truly as on me," said Blood, with a deep groan.

"Oh, then the measure of my crimes is complete! Howard, do you desert me even in death?" exclaimed the unhappy countess, making a convulsive effort to rise, and sinking shudderingly back as Howard turned away with bitter scorn, she exclaimed, "Oh, Heaven have mercy on my soul!" and fell struggling on her pillow in the agonies of death.

The painful scene was soon over, and just as a surgeon, hastily summoned, entered, the spirit had fled from its lacerated flesh.

A brief examination satisfied the mediciner of this fact, and Howard seemed then to be touched with the fate of his unfortunate and guilty countess. He wept profusely, and directed her remains to be immediately carried to Aumerle House; an office which was principally performed by Sir Philip Lloyd's soldiers; and he himself, without taking any farther notice of Mer-

vyn, followed. The surgeon was about to follow, when Blood, who had now crawled to an arm-chair, where he lay groaning miserably, called him back.

"I can't bear this any longer, doctor!" he yelled. "I am bursting all over, and still this cursed skin won't split and let out my boiling blood. Give me something for ease—what you will—a bowl of laudanum, doctor! I'll give you a guinea for every drop."

"You are dying of the plague, sir!" exclaimed the horrified mediciner. "It is the black plague of Italy, and a goblet of the purest wine would be as mortal to you as the strongest poison."

"Say you so, Master Galen?" exclaimed Blood, eagerly. "Tom, bring me a glass of brandy, camerado, for old acquaintance sake; I feel it will do me good now."

Hunt, with tears in his eyes, brought a tumbler, and as no one offered any objection, he filled it to the brim, and handed it to Blood. "That's a right lad," said the colonel, kindly. "Thou at least wilt miss a friend when I am gone, Tom—but never hang thy dewlaps, man. Had I lived thou shouldst not have lacked a coffin when they hanged thee! Here, gentlemen, wish me a good voyage. I am at the stirrup-cup!—Master Mervyn, can you not forgive me?"

"For what you have done against myself, I can and do, unhappy wretch!" said Mervyn.

"Then return to the Tower, and my life on't—ha, ha, my life!—Mistress Sydney is safe there, or dead," said Blood; then, slightly flavouring the brandy on his lips, he

added, "It is real Nantzic, Tom. Think you not, Master Aumerle, that centuries of penal fires—but what's the use of thinking? He who made us all will do what he likes with us, good or bad—inflict what suffering he will, yea, for all eternity—we must endure it, for he is the master, and hath the power to inflict." Then, taking the cup in his swollen hands, he swallowed the brandy to its dregs. The effect was immediate, and yelling out that he was on fire, he sprang up and dashed about the room in a paroxysm of agony. Dreading that he intended to throw himself into the well, Cavendish stationed himself there, while Mervyn endeavoured to soothe him into bed. But it was all in vain, until his raving and fury exhausted him, when he sunk senseless on the floor.

"Let us leave this charnel house—I will take charge of these papers—it is time we were with Sydney," said Lord Cavendish, hurriedly, and in fact the morning light begun to break on the gloomy scene. Mervyn readily complied, Hunt and Parrot promising to witness the last moments of their old leader, and with a sensation of extreme relief they found themselves in the fresh air once more.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MARRIAGE, AN EXECUTION, AND A FINIS.

THE two friends returned to the Tower, and early as it was, the guards readily admitted them at their lieutenant's orders. They found Sydney with the Earl of Leicester, but as he looked more composed Mervyn ventured to hope he had heard good news. Sydney replied, with a melancholy smile, that Sir John had been to inform him that his execution was ordered for that day, but that his brother could learn nothing of Aurora except that she had left Aumerle House in the morning with Lady Howard, and neither of them had returned. He endeavoured to conclude from these scanty premises, that she had escaped; but suddenly struck with the wild and haggard look of Mervyn, he hurriedly inquired what had happened. Cavendish briefly narrated the terrible scene of the night, to which Syd-

ney listened with extreme interest; but it seemed as if he clung principally to Blood's wild statements about his daughter. He embraced the young earl, nevertheless, with much affection, and seemed to congratulate him—but emotion choked his utterance.

At this moment a tapping was heard at the door, and Sir John Robinson himself appeared, ceremoniously escorting an old man, and a female wrapped in a large black cloak. All rose in evident surprise.

"Trouble yourselves not, gentlemen," said the old man. "I trust I shall not prove an unwelcome visiter being so fairly attended. I am John of Oliva, whom methinks you know, Colonel Sydney?—Lady, by your leave."

And drawing back her hood, he revealed the beautiful but very ghastly features of Aurora Sydney. A faint smile played upon her lips, which died away under the severe and protracted gaze of Sydney.

"Father! dearest father! do you not know me?" she said, almost inaudibly but for the deep stillness around.

"Prithee, who are you?" replied Sydney, with a look of such extreme agitation that his whole soul seemed shaken.

"I will tell you, sir," said Oliva, taking her hand encouragingly. "She is the purest and most virtuous of maidens, wanting nothing but the holiness of death to fit her for the white-robed company of virgin-martyrs! Listen to me—I will exonerate her of every of-

fence but what an angel might have done and never dimmed his amaranth."

The Jesuit looked at Sir John, who took the hint, and immediately retired. He then related those particulars with which the reader is already acquainted. Aurora had but just awoke from her trance, and in obedience to her passionate request, he had brought her to the Tower.

"My child—my own child—thy angel mother's true daughter!—this moment is dearer to me than a million years of such life as thy dishonour could have purchased," exclaimed Sydney, clutching her to his breast. "Good monk, I forgive the human motives that may have mingled with this heavenly deed of thine. Your party needs my blood, and so does my cause!"

"Oh, my father, and must you die?" wept Aurora. "It is not yet too late—leave not thy curse upon me, and I can yet—yet save you!"

"What wouldst thou preserve at such fathomless infamy, my child?" said Sydney, tenderly. "My life?—a life which nature will soon demand as a just debt? Would you deprive me of the eternal glory of dying for the great English people, to linger on a few short years of painful age? No, my true child!—old and running to the lees as is my life, I would have poured the dregs out with mine own hand, so preserved!—I must die, sweet innocent!—my blood is needed; it will fertilize the noble oak of English liberty, to bloom for everlasting ages! Were my native land but a poor ste-

ril rock—unknown to fame and never to be known—still I would have died cheerfully in her cause; but for my England, my mighty land, destined to extend her vast arms over half the earth, the mother of nations—oh, who so base as to refuse a million lives to her need? And to the latest age, to the latest hour of recorded time, shall Sydney's name be dear to this vast people—known, loved, reverenced—as far as the ocean spreads, which they shall rule!"

Aurora continued to weep, but she seemed to lack strength to speak, and Sydney repeatedly kissed her brow with passionate grief. But some pleasant and soothing idea seemed suddenly to beam on his agitated soul!

"Thou hast it at least in thy power to make my death happy," he said. "Good monk, perfect your work—marry this youth and maiden, with the dying blessing of their father. Let me live to see them wedded, as I have secretly hoped I should."

"Brother Algernon to whom would you wed my niece?" exclaimed the Earl of Leicester.

"To the son of my earliest and dearest friend, Earl Aumerle," replied Sydney. "And if he were a beggar's son, nature enrols him among her greatest nobles! Will you pleasure a dying man, father?"

"Wed Mervyn, now, my father!"

"Mourn me as long as nature prescribe, my child, but give me this consolation in death," said Sydney, gently. "Let Mervyn regard you but as a dear sister, till circumstances allow of a more open and splendid

marriage. My brother, Leicester, hath sworn to protect you with his life. At Penshurst, surrounded by a powerful family—by the phantoms of your murdered friends—you are secure. Mervyn's life, as England now stands, cannot be safe within its confines—let him to the court of the Prince of Orange, with a letter from me, who am not without honour in that sovereign's sight. Then, when time hath turned the sharp edge of your grief—and he hath won such means as may keep you both from poverty—let him return and claim his bride, with Heaven's sanction and mine. I have nought to leave you, children, but my blessing; the rest is confiscate to the tyrant—but better days are coming. Again I tell you, the blood of patriots quenches not, but feeds the sacred fire of liberty!"

"Give me a right to die for you, dearest Aurora!" said Mervyn, with deep and mournful tenderness.

"Heaven approves, my child, and I am willing to perform my part," said Oliva.

"Lady, give not way to weak scruples," said Lord Cavendish. "This is all that can now sweeten the draught of death to your noble father."

"But your life—your life, my father!" sobbed the unhappy lady. "Oh, must I carry to the grave the bitter thought that I might have saved you, and did not!"

"It is not so—I know it was never intended to save Sydney's life!" exclaimed the Jesuit. "At the council which the king left you to attend, York wrung from him the signature to your father's death-warrant."

Aurora made no farther scruples, but never was there so sad a wedding. Pale and almost insensible, she stood by the man to whom she was about to plight her faith, in the presence of that father on whom the scythe of death was about to descend. Mervyn was obliged to support her trembling frame during the ceremony, though he himself was so agitated as scarcely to falter forth the responses. Sydney, however, rested not till the link was riveted, and all he held dear on earth was confided to the brave and honest heart whose aspirations after the great and good he had himself directed from early manhood. Oliva never went without his breviary, and they lacked nothing but a plain ring, which Sydney procured by breaking the diamond out of one which he wore. The ceremony was soon completed, and Oliva blessed the bridal pair with pious fervour as they knelt to receive the closing benediction. Sydney raised his daughter in his arms, kissed her affectionately, and said as he placed her hand in Mervyn's—

"Be happy, my children! I have repaid you, Mervyn, for all the generous valour and love you have shown for me. I give you here my soul's last and choicest treasure!" Then, seeming to recollect something, he added placidly, "It is not till to-morrow; but I need some little pause to recollect myself. You shall return to me at noonday."

"Oh, let me stay with you, my father!" said Aurora. "I have a thousand things to say—a thousand forgivenesses to ask. You were always so good, so kind, so

tender to my faults—and I have caused you so many sorrows."

"Never one, my darling child," said Sydney, fondly.

"Oh, but I might have loved you more—have pleased you more, had I foreseen this moment—I could have made your life so much happier!" wept poor Aurora.

"No, my daughter," said Sydney, strongly affected—"no, not on earth! Go with your uncle, and whenever we meet again, be but as pure, as good, as gentle, as now that we part; and I am persuaded, in the infinite mercy of my God, we shall meet again in a realm where neither sorrow, nor sin, nor death, nor terror, shall ever come!"

There was something so inexpressibly sad in these parting words, that it seemed as if Aurora comprehended that that long lingering look of love was the last, and she sank insensible into her father's outstretched arms.

"Take her away now—to your wife, Leicester; it will spare me much pain!" said Sydney; and the earl and Lord Cavendish removed the senseless bride.

"If, Colonel Sydney, you need any spiritual assistance—" began Oliva, meekly; but Sydney interrupted him.

"Nay, I will not give my long life the lie at last; Sydney and his good cause need no intercessors with Heaven. I regard the Deity as the sole judge between Himself and His creature. I regard religion as a divine essence, and place no reliance on exterior forms."

"Sydney, you are a great and a good man, and pos-

terity will call you so!" said Oliva, extending his hand. "Which of us is right I know not—but I would die in my cause, as you die in yours."

They wrung each other's hands in silence, and parted for ever. Sydney retired to dress himself for the scaffold, and the brief conversation which ensued between Mervyn and his early protector, was broken by the entrance of a number of gentlemen anxious to pay their respects to the departing patriot. Oliva then retired, with an assurance to Mervyn that he would look to his welfare.

Sydney re-appeared very soon, in a suit of black velvet, serene and dignified as if it were merely an ordinary meeting of his friends. His brother now returned, and announced that Aurora was still insensible, and was in the care of his wife.

"Well, brother Philip, you will be good to her?" said Sydney. "Let us forgive and forget our foolish lawsuit, and only recollect that we had one mother, and that in our youth we have bled together in the same great cause. Shed no tear, brother, for I die very happy, save for my poor child. Come, let us embrace; you recollect how our ancient father blessed us both when he was dying—he and our mother will be glad even in Heaven to hear that we parted as good friends as they left us."

The brothers again embraced, and Leicester sobbed audibly.

"Your daughter, Algernon," he said, "shall be as

dear to me as mine own—I swear it, by our mother's memory."

"Come, gentlemen, I will drink to your good health, and our happy meeting at some future day," exclaimed Sydney. "Bring wine, warder, and of a better quality than that you gave me to supper. Ducas," he added, turning to the faithful steward, whose bleared eyes showed his sorrow, "Bring me my papers, and the copies you have made. This, in my own writing, I give to you, my dear son Aumerle, with this letter, which I desire you to convey to his highness, the Prince of Orange. This copy I leave with you, brother Leicester; and this I intend to give the sheriffs on the scaffold; but I doubt they will find it convenient to suppress it, as far as in them lies!"

"You do not think to address the people then, brother?" said Leicester. "It shall be well, for complaint and upbraidings will but further irritate your enemies."

"'Tis not for that, Phillip," said Sydney emphatically. "But that I fear to rouse the poorer sort, who will be there to weep for me, to some outrageous act which will but bathe the streets in blood, and not wash out the stain of tyranny. Moreover mine age, and the rigorous season, might prove impediments to my being heard; so I will leave my appeal to a tongue which neither kings nor crowds can silence. And I trust the time will come in England when no man shall be afraid to be of my hearers. I drink to all

your good estates," he said solemnly; "and to our happy re-union, gentlemen."

All drank the toast in silence, except Mervyn, whose lips trembled so that he dared not trust the wine to them.

"Drink, my son," said Sydney cheerfully. "This is the last glass we shall ever drink together. Do not forget me, nor the cause for which I suffer. Gentlemen, I pray you remark, I die at peace with all men, and as far as my personal feelings are concerned, even with those who have wronged my country of her liberties."

A warder now entered and whispered to Sir John, who, apologising for the interruption, informed Sydney that the sheriffs of London had sent in to demand his body.

"I deny that they are the sheriffs of London—their election was in violation of the city charters," said Sydney, warmly. "But let it be—they shall have what of me remains. I am ready."

"Tell their honours to step up—I must have a receipt for my prisoner," said Sir John. The sheriffs accordingly made their appearance, in full costume, bowing with ceremonious respect to their destined prey, and to the company.

"Master sheriffs," Sydney said with great calmness; "I will not quarrel with your errand on mine own account, for the world is now nothing to me; but I would entreat you, for your own sakes, to consider what heavy guilt you have incurred, in not returning a fair jury, but one packed by the solicitors for the crown."

"See," whispered Cavendish to Lord Leicester, "see how, like the good thief, one of them relents, and tears stream down his heavy visage."

The sheriffs and Sir John signed a mutual release, and the preparations being complete, Sydney was informed that all was ready. He seemed in no wise troubled, but shook hands with the warders who had waited on him, made each a present, and informed the lieutenant that he too was ready.

The procession then formed which was to escort the prisoner to the scaffold. A guard headed it, and the lieutenant, Mervyn, and the other gentlemen surrounding Sydney, they descended to the courtyard. A smile lighted the prisoner's noble countenance when he saw how brightly the sun was shining, and what masses of anxious faces were around. There was a light sprinkle of snow on the ground, and the roofs glittered with a hoar frost.

They reached the outer gate of the fortress, where the sheriffs' coaches waited, but Sydney declared he would rather walk the short distance which remained to the scaffold, and as the way was densely lined with mounted soldiers, no objection was made. The people could not even catch a glimpse of him as he came, though from the extraordinary flutter and excitement they were aware that he had left the Tower. The scaffold was visible all the way as they went, on the point where Tower Hill debouches into the great esplanade of the fortress. It was hung with black cloth, and guarded by a great body of horsemen.

When they reached the stairs ascending to the scaf-

fold, Sydney paused for a moment to bid his friends farewell. He desired that no one should accompany him up but Mervyn and two of his servants, shook hands with all, and embraced his brother affectionately. He then with unaltered composure mounted the scaffold, leaning on Mervyn's shoulder.

When once his appearance was manifest to the vast masses assembled, there was a general and tremendous shout of "Sydney!" and then a silence so profound and extraordinary that the sheriffs turned pale, and looked at each other in great alarm. Sydney bowed, and glanced with a calm undismayed eye over the vast assemblage. The wide space surrounding the Tower ditch was densely packed with spectators, the numerous streets which verged into it, every window, every roof, even the ramparts of the fortress, were black with gazers. The sentinels even paused, leaning on their glittering partizans over the battlements, but the fortress was decked out in banderols and flags as if for some general festival.

"It is only the dungeons of England that are glad to-day!" said Sydney, with a calm smile. "Behold! here is the great English people present! this generation of men will tell the tale to their children, and they to theirs, and my name shall be eternal as the English tongue to utter it, and in many a region of which we dream not yet."

"It shall be blessed as long as Jeffreys is cursed!" said Mervyn, with enthusiasm.

"They expect a speech from me, it seems, and I have

none to make them," said Sydney. "Good people, I have made my peace with God. I come not hither to make a speech, but to die. Here, master sheriffs, I desire you to take charge of this paper, which contains all the last words I intend to make. I desire not to read it, nor to have it read to the multitude, for I am no mutiny-stirrer. Look not so dejected, son," he said, cheerfully clapping Mervyn on the shoulder. "I am going to a better place than I leave you in, and I die in as good and great a cause as ever was, though for a time it seems unfortunate, and for which I bled in my youth, when my veins flowed not so laggardly. Be kind to my poor orphan, Mervyn! my last words are a blessing on you both. And at some future day," he added, with an affectionate smile, "tell her I desired your heir might be called Algernon Sydney! And now farewell day and night, and joy and trouble, and welcome eternal peace! I do trust my country will not forget me, and if a brighter day should come, this elevated spot on which they have raised my scaffold may, perchance, prove the basis of a statue to my memory. But no, in a land which hath not raised a temple to the memory of Alfred, Sydney may well lack even a gravestone."

Mervyn was too much affected to reply, and Sydney asked for the executioner, who advanced with a familiar bow, touching the top of his black mask in respect.

"I desire you will not hack me as you did my Lord Russell, sir," said Sydney. "Here are three guineas for you—what, is that not enough for taking off an old

head like mine? Give him three more, Ducas, if he does it cleverly. Prithee, let me feel your axe."

The executioner raised the axe, and Sydney felt the edge, and seemed satisfied that it was sharp enough.

"Let not my daughter see my corpse," said Sydney, earnestly. "You will bury me at Penshurst, Mervyn, as near my father and mother as may be, and privately, though I forbid no man to weep that hath tears, in such a cause. It will be about sunset to-morrow when you go up the old avenue of oaks to Penshurst; I pray you remember then, as you pass it, that perched high in the branches of that hollow oak, which is the last, it was my boyhood's delight to study old Plutarch's characters. I trust my death will not disgrace him whom I chose as my model even then—Marcus Brutus!"

"Here are forty thousand spectators, and your honour alone seems unconcerned," sobbed Ducas.

"Would you have me die worse than common wretches, who daily outbrave death for picking a pocket?" said Sydney.

"Are you ready, sir?" exclaimed one of the sheriffs. "If you are, I must indeed tell you, Mr. Sydney, that it would become your great quality and Christian demeanour, to tell the people that you acknowledge the justice of your death, and desire forgiveness."

"I die for my country, and the last act of my life shall not give the lie to the rest!" said Sydney, with a slightly scornful smile.

"Then, sir, the clock has past our time," said the sheriff, abruptly.

"I think so, too," replied Sydney, calmly. "Are you ready, friend, with the axe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And so am I. And now farewell, Mervyn, till we meet above!" said Sydney, turning to his young disciple. They embraced, and the mob, who perceived that the moment of execution had arrived, uttered faint cries and sobs, while women shrieked and swooned, and it seemed as if that vast mob were joining in one loud and general lamentation, though Sydney's stern character had prevented him from ever being the popular idol. He bowed, and a gleam of satisfaction, brighter than a smile, came over his face. His servants then stripped off his doublet and cravat, and opened the neck of his shirt. He then knelt conveniently at the block, and for a few brief moments seemed absorbed in solemn prayer. After this he wrung Mervyn's hand once more, and observing that he was speechless with grief, murmured in a low voice, "Give my love to Aury; tell her, if my soul be eternal, that love will be so too!" And he laid his head on the block.

"Will you rise again, sir?" said the executioner, lifting his axe, and almost grazing the neck in levelling his aim.

"Not till the general resurrection; strike on!" was the reply, and instaneously the axe rose, glittered, fell, and the severed head rolled on the scaffold! The executioner instantly clutched it up by the long fair hair, and held it up at the four corners of the scaffold, exclaiming, "BEHOLD THE HEAD OF A TRAITOR!" To

each of which asseverations, Mervyn replied in a loud voice, "No!"

That No has been echod by posterity.

Sydney's funeral took place next day at Penshurst, and at that sad ceremony did Mervyn and his youthful wife meet again, but only to part. Bowed down with grief and anguish as she was, even the consolation of his presence was denied her; information arrived from Oliva that it was the intention of the now despotic government to seize him again; there was no resource but flight, and he fled to Holland.

The fame of his extraordinary adventures, and Sydney's letter, recommended him to the notice of the Prince of Orange, although without any public demonstration. His perfect acquaintance with the plot and plotters, and all the broken skeins of the popular party which William of Orange was anxious to knit up in his own hand, rendered him almost invaluable to that prince. His advice was eagerly sought, and Mervyn, who had now transferred his allegiance from his king to his country, thought it no treason to encourage the ambitious visions of the Dutch prince. Meanwhile the Earl of Leicester, at his own cost and expense, commenced formal proceedings in the House of Lords for the restoration of Mervyn's title and estates, which Howard had now seized and rioted in. But he met with continued and most vexatious delays on the part of the chancellor, Jeffreys, and though the validity of the young earl's claim was not resisted, it remained a dead letter in consequence.

With all his favour at the court of the Hague, it is not impossible that Mervyn might have starved there, as the economical prince never took it into his royal head that a banished fugitive must be in want of everything. But the thoughtful love of his young wife supplied this deficiency; she sent him all her jewels, with an affectionate assurance that he was to consider it only as a loan, till more prosperous times enabled him to repay her with interest.

Shortly after, he was relieved from a still greater uneasiness by the death of Charles II., who departed suddenly, either by poison or apoplexy. Oliva's influence over the mind of his successor was unlimited, and, under pretext of producing him as evidence against Oates, who was now indicted for perjury, he obtained Mervyn permission to return to London.

Mervyn's evidence was that which brought the wretch to his condign punishment; he it was who proved that, at the time when Oates swore he had been at the consult of the Jesuits held in London, he was at St. Omer, and he horrified the court with a detail of his monstrous crimes. The lawyers, however, contented themselves with their own indictment, for there was only one witness to the other facts; and Mervyn had the satisfaction of hearing that sentence pronounced, which, tremendous as it was, seemed weak and impotent compared to the criminal's offences:—A fine of one hundred thousand pounds, public and annual exposure on the pillory, to be whipped by the hangman from Newgate to Tyburn, and perpetual imprisonment! This sentence, pronounced with

infinite gusto by Jeffreys, is almost the only one of the hundreds he gave in his time which posterity has applauded, as did the crowded court which heard it delivered.

From London, Mervyn flew on the wings of love to Penshurst, where Leicester resided in retirement. How he was received—with what passionate joy by the beautiful orphan who had but him left in the world to love—must be imagined, not described. The gay and imaginative girl had ripened into the calm and thoughtful woman, and her beauty had acquired a still more touching interest from the serene and gentle melancholy which shaded its lustre.

Jeffreys no longer offered his delays to Mervyn's suit, and judgment was pronounced in his favour; the necessary measures to eject Howard were in forwardness, and Mervyn awaiting the assemblage of Parliament to take his seat, after which his nuptials were to be publicly solemnized with Aurora, when suddenly the insurrection of Monmouth alarmed all England. Without the least shadow of pretext, the government of James II. thought proper to suspect Mervyn of a share in this new conspiracy, and to avoid incarceration he again fled to Holland.

The world was greatly changed there also. The Prince of Orange immediately confided the command of his guards to the young earl, and he was one of the principal movers of that grand revolution which shattered the tyrannous throne of the Stuarts. After that

great event, honours, riches, and fame, were showered upon him. He was restored to all his rights, and the illustrious titles of his ancient house; wedded, with a pomp which outshone all but royal nuptials, to the beautiful daughter of Sydney; and lived to a good old age, in the enjoyment of every earthly happiness; dying, as the great monument in Mervyn Abbey records, at the age of eighty-three years—surviving his wife, Aurora Sydney, only six months. According to the same inscription he died a Knight of the Garter, and Constable of the Tower, leaving a numerous issue, the eldest of whom, "Algernon Sydney d'Aumerle," was created a peer in his father's lifetime, as head of the deputation which carried the news of his accession to George I. The same vault also contains the body of the murdered Lord Aumerle, transported thither from the Tower, with great funeral pomp and honours; and at its feet was laid another coffin, without inscription, but which a constant tradition ascribes as the last dwelling-place of Claude Duval.

There are a variety of memoranda still preserved in the Aumerle family, written by the earl, which may, perhaps, interest such readers as have taken an interest in the minor personages of our chronicle. After taking a review of the principal events of his stormy youth, and thanking God that, at the age of eighty-two, he still preserved his dear wife, and all his senses in great vigour, the earl proceeds—"And now, indeed, it doth something startle me, looking back at those times, to

remember that I am, as it were, the last oak of a noble forest, standing bare and alone, that was once surrounded by the verdure of a thousand contemporaries. The woodsman, Death, hath spared scarcely one; and of all the actors in the fearful drama of my youth, not indeed one. Charles II., James II., William of Nassau and his queen, Anna of York, in succession my sovereigns, have past into the tomb, and (which, indeed, something troubles me) a prince who cannot speak English sits on the throne of Alfred; of the whigs, as they are now commonly called, Shaftesbury died in his bed, Lord Russell, my father, Sydney, (whose attainders were reversed as soon as we had king William on the throne,) and the Duke of Monmouth—were beheaded; my lord Essex died in the Tower; Howard of Eskricke perished in great misery of poverty and desertion; my Lord Argyle was beheaded at Edinburgh. Of the court party, that most infamous judge and chancellor, Jeffreys, was nigh torn to pieces by a mob, and died miserably in the Tower; Colonel Blood expired in great agonies a few days after that dreadful scene in Whitefriars, wherein my unhappy mother perished; the wretch who poisoned him, I found his skeleton many years after when, being constable of the Tower, I caused the subterraneous passage to be mortared and stone-choked. As for Master Chiffinch, he followed King James to France, and I never heard any more of him; Mrs. Creswold, I am told, died a most horrible death in prison. As to that most abominable

of all wretches, Titus Oates, he survived his severe flaying, and was released at the revolution, but I did hear from many hands that the remnant of his years were so lashed by the whips of conscience that he enjoyed no peace on earth, and left it at last in hideous despair."

THE END.

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